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A LOVE EPISODE.

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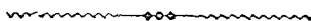
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I.

THE LAST VICTIMS.

IN the vast hall where the Revolutionary Tribunal of Paris held its sessions, in the Palais de Justice, five-and-twenty prisoners were crammed together on rows of seats in the dock. This "batch," destined to be the last of this sanguinary epoch, was nearly ready for the scaffold, the hearing being at the very end.

The presiding judge was questioning the final culprits in a curt, dreadful manner. On a name being called, two or three questions, sometimes sarcastic when the prisoner attempted to answer, and the awful word, "Next!" fell like the death sentence it was.

On the highest row of the dock seats, near one of the narrow windows, a tall and haughty old man was waiting his turn. His thin and finely-chiselled features, crowned with snow-white hair, appeared plainly in the full glare. His fixed eyes, and firm, erect attitude seemed to say: "I am ready," like a soldier facing the foe. All courage commands respect, and the spectators admired the lofty mien which clearly paraded pride of race and scorn of danger.

"Citizen Pontis, formerly known as the Count de Sainte-Hélène!" repeated the presiding judge after his clerk's call.

"I am he," replied the old nobleman, in a ringing voice.

"You had a son who fled from his country in the second year of the Republic?"

"I have two sons. The elder was killed at the Battle of Valmy, fighting for the Republic. The one you mention is the last of his name; he left France, but never raised a hand against her. He served Spain in her American colonies."

"This is beside the question," interrupted the presiding judge. "France is at war with the Spanish tyrant, your son is a runaway, and you are accused of supporting him with funds. How do you answer that?"

"It is the truth," rejoined the old noble firmly.

This was pronouncing his own death sentence, and this bold simplicity staggered the bench. The president bent towards his brother judges and consulted them an instant.

"Citizen," he proceeded, when he spoke again, "the Republic is merciless towards traitors, yet it is just. Mayhap you were unaware of the law meting out the death penalty on all who keep up relations with fugitive nobles?"

As this question opened an escape to the accused, a sympathetic thrill moved the audience. In the midst of an ensuing silence, the old man was seen to lower his eyes as in reflection, probably thinking of the absent son whom he had lost all hope of ever seeing again, but whom he might meet if he spoke an untruth. This hesitation was but brief. Lifting his head, he replied :

"I will not redeem my life with a falsehood : I did know the law. But," he went on, with a scornful smile, " the laws of nature overrule those of the Republic."

When the even, ringing voice uttered this sentence, a suppressed exclamation rose from a remote corner. The old peer looked in that direction, as though to thank the stranger for his pity. On the moment vivid emotion convulsed his previously calm countenance ; his gaze became riveted on one spot ; he turned pale visibly, like one facing an unexpected apparition ; he even made as if to spring forward, held out both arms, and could hardly stifle an outburst of surprise. But speedily mastering himself, he smothered the momentary flame in his eyes, and resumed his motionless and indifferent attitude.

" Bless us ! " cried one of the women who lived on the excitement of trials and executions, and who were called " the knitters " because they plied the needles before both bench and scaffold as if sitting quietly at the fireside, " what is the old once-upon-a-time peer peering at us for, ha, ha ? Is it you who set him on the stare, citizen Cassius ? "

Citizen Cassius was a handsome fellow, under twenty-four, with a frank and manly countenance, as much contrasting with the ignoble ones around him as his uniform—that of the Convention grenadiers, blue coat and striped trousers—did with the red caps and blouses of his neighbours. His only weapon was a hanger from a broad white baldric. It was easily seen that he was here merely out of curiosity.

" Nonsense, citizeness Giffard, do I look so like an agent of Pitt and Coburg that I am to be accused of mixing with aristocrats ? Let me tell you flat, though, that if that old blade were an acquaintance of mine, chop my head off if I'd deny him, as true as I am Pierre Coignard, by right of baptism, and Cassius Publicola in the section of pikes. Is not that a fact, citizen ? " queried he of a neighbour.

The latter was a man of thirty, wearing a costume much in fashion at the time, a long-skirted coat caught in at the waist, rather tight breeches, and top-boots. His fist held a knotted club, which he could no doubt handle easily, to judge by the breadth of his shoulders ; in his whole bearing there was a military air ill-suited his foppish citizen's attire. He did not seem to have heard citizen Cassius's question, being deep in thought, as his frowning brow plainly betrayed.

" I say, is it you who know that old ex-noble ? " repeated the grenadier, astonished at the silence, and touching the other's elbow so that he turned round.

Eyeing Cassius, as if roused from a dream, he hissed through his close-set teeth :

" His eldest son died at Valmy, and the Republic pays for the boy's blood with the father's."

" I was in that battle, comrade," said Cassius. " You are right ! If the jury had heard the Prussian bullets whistle round us like I did, they'd let the old man off, because of his lost boy, as you call him.

But there's citizen Fouquier-Tinville getting on his legs, and I am afraid the game is up."

Indeed, the dreaded public prosecutor had risen to settle the affair. It was high time.

At that same moment, events were in progress which well might reverse the parts in the tragedy being played before the tribunal of blood. Cannon was thundering on the riverside, and the drums beat incessantly.

The fate of France was in the scales at the Convention. The *Montagne** was offering fight for the last time in the rostrum, and these twenty-five prisoners knew that their heads formed part of the stakes of this mighty game.

The court did not wear its every-day aspect. Dark and uneasy, the jurors communed together; now and then, on receiving mysterious messages, they became still more gloomy. The prisoners scanned their judges' faces anxiously for a gleam of hope.

Dull murmurs came in at the windows and floated over the rows of seats. Whispers, as from spirits, seemed to say: "Forgive them!"

It was a solemn moment as the jury gave their verdict: all but one were pronounced guilty.

The presiding judge rose, put on the black cap, and was just about to utter the decree of death, when there was a tramp at the door and the grounding of muskets. A squad of soldiers appeared, preceding an official of the Convention, who walked up to the bench and loudly read an order for the arrest of the presiding judge.

It was a culminating situation worthy of a drama.

The prisoners started up on their forms, quivering with joyous hope, and the judges looked at one another, pale with terror. They feared to see the tables completely turned.

But Fouquier-Tinville rose, cold and unshaken, and in his monotonous voice claimed the application of the penalty. The senior judge read the death sentence. The last name he read was that of Louis François Pontis de Sainte-Hélène, ex-captain of cavalry, guilty of correspondence with enemies of the Republic.

The old peer bravely saluted the bench, and called out loudly:

"My son is no foe of his native land." His eyes turned anew to the nook where the man with the club was standing.

"Hang me, if I haven't friends in the Prince de Condé's army," muttered the grenadier. "He persists in looking at me. Unless somebody else hard by is a mate of his," added he, squinting at his neighbour.

The latter did not resent the quip. Still musing, he let the crowd sweep him away, eager as it was for another sight. In a twinkling the hall was emptied. Whilst the noisy torrent of spectators rushed down the grand stairway, in order to see the tumbrels come forth, the court-room guards marched the culprits down the dark way leading from the Hall of Justice into the Conciergerie. Through the twilight this confused mass rolled with a sobbing sound.

Among them were three young women, who had arrayed themselves in white as the brides of Death, and their shriller moans were

* The *Montagne* was the nickname of that party who occupied the upper back seats in the Convention, and hence towered like a mountain-top over the others.

readily distinguishable. At the first landing a ray of hope fell upon them. Instead of taking the turn to the cells, the guards went down towards the waterside.

Just then shouting from without came to them, louder and louder as they drew near the open air.

"Down with the guillotine! we're sick of it! Set the prisoners free!" roared the mob.

An electrical shock thrilled the trembling group.

Freedom! Perchance it was for that they were led out. They hastened their steps so as to cover the lowermost stones rapidly, and then emerge from under the riverward vaulted way. The open gates showed the sunny quays. A howl of delight flew from every throat.

Life was there amid the multitude, ever crying out "Freedom!" Women in the crowd waved their arms upward, as though beckoning to mercy.

Just on this side of the gateway a low door opened into a long and narrow room. Here the guards pushed the victims. A dark entrance; but the sun burst in at a side window, and illumined half-a-dozen men at the farther end. One of the six was clad in black, and was bare-headed; the others wore the red cap and frock; two of these carried lengths of rope.

The man in black was the executioner, and the rest his assistants.

II.

FIDELITY.

WHEN six o'clock struck, the waiting throng still covered the waterside. The Conciergerie gates were closed, and nothing betrayed when the condemned would come forth. Some of the inquisitive people only looked for what had become a daily feast and regular habit. Others lingered from another motive; these were the more numerous. Nothing had leaked out certain upon the events in progress in the Convention. If the executions were deferred, it meant that the Moderates triumphed; if, on the other hand, the guillotine was supplied with material, the Extremists had won.

Hence, the coming forth of the sinister procession would be a decisive token.

The mob was jammed in between the corner of the quay and the Pont-au-Change.

Our grenadier, Cassius Publicola, stood in the front of a compact and noisy group, holding forth in a general conversation.

"It is too bad, old girl," he shouted to the woman who had spoken to him in the court-room, "but you are swindled to-day—all the fun is put off till to-morrow."

"Don't be too sure, my lad. The days are long in Thermidor, and there is plenty of time before dark for the *aristos* to dance without their heads."

"Very likely, citizeness. But the Place du Trône-Renversé is far enough from here, and if they are not ready in the next half an hour, mind you, they will have to enjoy their ball by candle-light."

"What's that got to do with it? Charlot (Jack Ketch) is rich enough to pay for lights."

"Quite right; old Sanson has plenty of money. I say, mother Giffard, just ask him if his machine to shorten folks is in working order. There he is, turning the corner where the clock is."

"Sanson! you're off your balance, you stupid grenadier! At this very moment he is dressing the hair of the noble parties for the hop."

"Oh, no! I don't know daddy Sanson, don't I? I can tell you I have mended many a lock in his house in the Rue Neuve Saint-Jean before I changed from handling house-locks for firelocks."

"Hang me, if he's not right," grumbled the hag, "it is old Sanson with his white hair and red nose. What's in the wind now, I wonder, that he's strolling along like a dandy?"

A tall man was making his way through the multitude, holding his head low and carrying his hands behind him, for everybody made room for him. By his somewhat rounded shoulders and broad ruddy countenance, the frequenters of executions recognised the headsman of Paris, and curiously watched him, for his appearance in the street at such an hour on foot was a novel occurrence.

Surprised as well as the others by so unexpected a sight, grenadier Cassius was also a-stare, when a hand clapped him on the shoulder. He turned quickly, to find himself facing his late neighbour in the court-room.

He was very pale; he still carried his stick and held in leash with the other hand a fine Danish dog, which lifted a soft, intelligent eye to its master.

"Do you know citizen Sanson to speak with him?" questioned the latter.

His bearing was so uncommon that Cassius replied quite respectfully:

"Rather, citizen. Why do you ask?"

"Because in that case I may ask you to do me a service."

"Willingly, though it strikes me you are only a republican for the time being; but I am sure you have been a soldier."

Obedying an inexplicable instinct, he ceased to use the tone of one addressing an equal.

"Yes, and I am one now," answered the stranger in a lower tone.

"I spoke to you because of your uniform."

"I am afraid it does not resemble yours, and that we have looked along muskets at one another, but I shall not denounce you. Pierre Coignard is not the man to live on the informer's blood-money. Ask me the service, comrade."

"Not yet; I only said I might do so. Anyhow, who can tell that I may not lend you a helping hand to-morrow, after you oblige me to-day?"

"All right, I understand. Who's to be cock of the walk is in course of settlement in the Convention at present, and you hope that the expelled nobles will be governing France to-morrow?"

"I hope for nothing, grenadier Coignard," returned the stranger, laying a finger on his lips; "but what is Sanson doing among the people?"

"May my last sneeze be in his basket of sawdust if I know. He seems to be looking for somebody. See, he crosses the quay as if he

had spied his man. Ay, the tall thin chap leaning on the parapet. What the deuce and all beguiles Charlot into small talk at the very time when he has his hands full? Ha! I can't mistake? No! I am not astonished now. That colourless face and flat hair belong to citizen Fouquier-Tinville."

The name made the neighbour blanch still more, and redouble his attention.

It was undoubtedly the public accuser whom Sanson had accosted, and they held an animated colloquy. The old executioner, hat in hand, spoke in the bowed attitude of an agent inquiring his principal's instructions, and Fouquier, with stiff neck and body leaning back, listened to him with disdainful shakes of the head and waves of the hand. It was a short interview. With a sweeping gesture by way of command, Fouquier dismissed his questioner, and departed towards the Pont-au-Change, while Sanson slowly strode to the Conciergerie. This notable dialogue had thousands of spectators, and the nearest bystanders circulated snatches of the conversation.

"Charlot wanted to put off the job to another day," screamed one of the horrible women called "The Furies of the Guillotine."

"That's unfair!" rejoined another of her sort; "a shame to keep the people here and get no show."

"What a good thing citizen Fouquier sent him off with a flea in his ear. Ah! he's a trump, he is! Did you hear the round way he said: 'The sentence was delivered. Do your duty. The rest is no concern of yours?'"

The Conciergerie gates closed behind the executioner, and the mob became less uproarious on feeling that the decisive moment was at hand.

"We shall know all about it soon," observed the grenadier. "It's on the stroke of seven, and if we don't see the tumbrels in ten minutes, it will be because the journey to the Trône-Remversé is put off till to-morrow. And it's a good stretch between one day and another in life-and-death matters, eh! officer mine?"

Citizen Cassius was still speaking, when the stranger clutched his arm as though to break it, whilst glaring over at the prison. The gates turned slowly on their hinges, and revealed under the gloomy arch a glitter of naked swords in the setting sunbeams.

A deafening cheer burst from the gathering.

Horses' hoofs struck showers of sparks from the pavement as the first prisoners' cart came out on the quay towards the bridge; two others followed. All three contained the same array: a pair of hideous fellows, folding their arms and smoking pipes on the front seat, who were the headsman's assistants; eight prisoners huddled in anyhow; some standing to face the crowd, others bent double and propped up against one another, swaying as the vehicle was jolted.

In the last one, chance had collected the most affecting victims, unless it was the executioner meaning to class those most likely to move the masses, for on this occasion there was an ardent hope that there would be an interruption to the sanguinary work. Three women were in it—their hair coiled up to leave the slender neck bare, their arms pinioned, their tearful eyes surveying the spectators for a friendly face—a deliverer, perhaps.

As the carts rounded the corner at the head of the bridge, they passed before the stranger's eyes. He looked for a condemned person whom he could not see in the first two conveyances. In the last, as it came on, the women's white dresses alone met the eye. But as it passed him, he uttered a groan, or, to speak more correctly, a roar. In the final row, in the attitude of a soldier marching to death, stood the old nobleman styled in his death-sentence the Count de Sainte-Helene. His tall form was bent from his hands being tied behind his back, but yet his head towered above his doomed companions.

Instantly arose a sonorous barking: the dog held in leash by the stranger had snapped its chain and sprang to the cart. It almost reached the old noble's feet, but, meeting the wheel, was hurled back; the prisoner recognised the animal beyond doubt, for tears suddenly welled out of his eyes. The dog leaped again and again, and augmented his joyful barks. He ran to the cart and back again, as if to imply, "Come on! that's our friend up there!"

"What's your dog's name?" asked the grenadier sharply.

"Tarquin," was the hollow reply.

"Tarquin! here, Tarquin!" shouted Cassius with all his lungs. "Come here and lay down, you noisy brute!" In a whisper he added: "Don't you speak, or you are a dead man! That rascal Darius, the trooper, is looking this way."

One of the escort was, indeed, eyeing that part of the crowd suspiciously.

"Hallo, Cassius!" called out he; "is this your cur?"

"Can't you see it is, by its answering to its name."

"He keeps bad company. This will do you no good in your section."

"I can't help it. He used to belong to a noble, and he knows the upper classes well."

"So much the worse for him."

He leaned over to prick poor Tarquin with his long sword, but the dog nearly unhorsed him by evading the thrust, and continued his gambols. The real owner shook his club convulsively, and tried to get out of the crowd, but Cassius carefully kept before him, and every time the dog came back that way he patted him on the head.

"Thanks," said the stranger, surprised at this unaccountable devotion.

After crossing the bridge the sightseers divided. The majority had enough of it, and went towards the Tuileries; the insatiable portion followed on behind the funereal train, and included the grenadier and the stranger he befriended.

At the bridge-head the escort right-wheeled on to the Quai Pelletier.

Two months before, the execution ground had been shifted from the Place de la Révolution to the cross-roads at the Barrière du Trône, now known as the Place du Trône-Renversé.

Every day the tumbrels crossed the Place de Grève, and followed the long and narrow Rue Saint-Antoine, to come out on the space where the Bastille had stood; an hour's drive, during which, on this day, deliverance might come.

The popular ward wore a strange aspect. Cannon were massed around the Hôtel de Ville, and men armed with guns and pikes were

running to and fro in bands. At times shouts arose of "To arms!" and there was a constant buzz issuing from the old hall where the city rulers were sitting.

In the middle of the Place half the escort dropped off to join with the Hôtel de Ville defenders, crying out:

"Excuse us, Charlot, but you will have to make cold meat of 'em without us."

Where the Rue Saint-Antoine began there were only eight gendarmes to guard the prisoners. The advance was slow. The cowering assistant-headsmen looked more like culprits than their charges, and Sanson kept glancing back as though expecting a messenger with a respite.

Cassius and his companion had worked their way into the first row of followers at the last cart's tail, which they could almost touch. They could have caught hold of the old prisoner's hand.

His noble face was singularly moved; the eyes were at one moment lifted heavenward, as though in gratitude for an unexpected boon, and at the next fell upon the stranger's pale face, with all his soul in the gaze.

After his outburst of delight, Tarquin followed tranquilly enough.

In the middle of the Rue Saint-Antoine a great riot began. A clatter of swords and horses' hoofs came rushing down upon the mob, much more compact here, and scattered it right and left.

It was a squad of horse, whose officer flourished his sword and yelled like mad:

"On to the Council, comrades! on to the Council!"

Having to pull up sharply or run into the carts, the officer threw his horse back so violently that it slipped and broke its leg. The eight troopers of the escort consulted together, and, after a brief hesitation, joined the new-comers. One alone, whom the grenadier named as Darius, dismounted, and offered the unhorsed officer his steed, saying:

"Go on without me, comrades; I mean to stick to this weak-kneed Charlot, whom I am inclined to believe wants to rob the scaffold of its day's allowance."

The officer wanted no urging; he leaped into the saddle and galloped off with his increased force to the Hôtel de Ville, whilst the wretch Darius clambered into the last cart, calling out:

"Give me a place in your coach, Charlot, and mind your neck if you play the traitor!"

As the escort disappeared, the crowd closed up and thickened. Afar on the Place de la Bastille, this human river became an ocean.

"We'll never get there," said Sanson, in a voice that would be overheard by the prisoners and taken for a signal. "The people are not going to allow this execution."

At the same time, from all three conveyances, sobs, appeals, and screams of anguish pealed forth.

"Mercy, citizens," shrieked one of the women, "we are not enemies of the country. Look at me—scarce twenty—how could I have injured the people? Help! let us go!"

"See my white hairs!" said a culprit, bent with age. "I tell you I have served my native land, and am I to die the traitor's death? Mercy! deliver us!"

"Let me free, brothers," cried a boy, "that I may go to the frontier and fight the foes of the Republic!"

The tall old nobleman alone held his peace. Calm and still, he was absorbed in one mighty thought, and his gaze was ever on the stranger. The crowd wavered. Those near at hand sobbed or wept, and suppressed exclamations arose ; this murmur of commiseration, though, was not the mercy of deliverance.

On went the carts, each turn of the wheels bearing the wretches nearer that doom which a little effort would have baffled.

Suddenly a ringing voice rose from the followers of the rear cart :

"There's been bloodshed enough," it was the grenadier who protested, "let's have no more guillotining ! Mercy, in the name of the Convention !"

"How now, rogue," returned trooper Darius's shrill voice, "well did I know you were an aristocrat at heart. You've done for yourself this time, I tell 'ee !"

This threat was overwhelmed by the stupendous clamour arising from all over the great space.

"Mercy ! mercy ! let them free."

A formidable rush packed the crowd in upon the procession. In a few seconds what had been an open interval held a panting mass ; the foremost pressed up against the very wheels. It was a fatal move, for these were so horrified at touching the shameful vehicles that they recoiled irresistibly with a yell of pain and horror. These same blood-spillers, who had gloated on so many death-spectacles, shrank from touching the coaches of death.

There was an open way once more, and the road to the scaffold was free.

"Drive on, Charlot !" roared the infamous trooper, with a chuckle.

After that critical moment hope was extinguished.

All through the Saint-Antoine ward the people remained dull and dumb, and the procession passed along unimpeded. The prisoners' appeals died away, and they nerved themselves to meet death.

Lo ! the open space where the temporary throne had been erected for the city officials to receive Marie Antoinette on first arriving at the capital. Above the trees gleamed the red arms of the guillotine. A few sightseers filled the streets leading into the deserted Place. The scaffold was guarded by pikemen. As soon as the carts stopped, the executioner's men made the prisoners step down.

In the midst of the doomed the Count de Sainte-Hélène's uncommon height attracted all eyes, and there was a cry of pity from every bosom when Tarquin was seen to dart upon his master and cover him with caresses. None of the assistants offered to repel him.

The death-roll was read.

As each name was proclaimed by the court-usher, one of the prisoners would leave the rest and walk up the scaffold steps. The knife would fall with a dull thud and spring up again, dripping with blood. For eight-and-twenty minutes this went on, and the count's turn was yet to come.

During this agonising suspense, he had not moved or lifted a hand ; his eyes were bent on one point in the throng, and he did not once turn to see his fellow-captives march into eternity. But, when the executioner's man touched him, to warn him his time had come, he bowed in salute to some one dear, and called out in Spanish :

"Fare thee well, my boy ! *A Dios, hijo !*" and ascended the stairs.

As if he understood his dear old master was about to die, Tarquin flung himself before him, with doleful howlings. The men tried to drive him away, but the courageous animal, spite of the blows and kicks, bounded through and up the steps, where, from on top of the dreadful platform, he uttered a heartrending howl. As the head of the Count de Sainte-Hélène fell into the basket, the dog landed at the base of the scaffold, kicked off by one of the men.

"Beast of a dog," said Darius, who had watched the whole episode from below ; "go, join your master !"

So saying, the scoundrel ran the dog through with his sword, and it died with a plaintive yelp.

This wanton cruelty was the cue for general indignation. The brutalised throng, which let men and women be butchered, was disgusted at the slaughter of a dog, and set to pelting the executioners. But the wrath of the populace is short-lived. There was nothing more to see, and all were eager to go back to town and tell the story of what had happened.

III.

WHO AND WHAT PIERRE COIGNARD WAS.

HALF-AN-HOUR after this pitiful hecatomb, the broad Place was almost deserted. A few paces from the instrument of justice, the stranger leaned against an elm tree, questioning the grenadier.

"Who is that fellow ?" he inquired, pale as before, grinding his teeth, and fastening his fiery eyes upon poor Tarquin's slayer, who was chatting with the assistant executioners.

"A scamp, not worth the penn'orth of rope to hang him : one of the gang who massacred the helpless prisoners in September, '92, who became a hussar guard of the guillotine from love of bloodshed."

"Will you do me a favour ?"

"I said as much, and I always keep my word."

"And I never forget him who does me a service."

"Well, monsieur, Pierre Coignard is under your orders."

"I must speak with Sanson, the executioner. Can you take me to him ?"

"This evening, if it will suit. Is that all ?"

"No."

"Go on."

The other was eyeing the soldier Darius, who was slowly walking townwards, and he said, absently :

"Lend me your blade."

Without a word, the grenadier unbuckled belt and all, and handed it to him. He examined the weapon, bent it, tried the strength of the handle, and, finally, hung it on himself, doubtless satisfied with the tests.

"A fair exchange is no robbery, officer," said Cassius ; "would you let me have your cudgel ?"

"Take it. What do you want it for ?"

"In case it comes handy while I am along with you."

"You will not be able to follow me, and I need no aid. You can wait for me by the Bastille. If I am not back in a couple of hours, rate me dead. For that contingency, take now the price of a sword."

He put a double-louis in Cassius's hand.

"Many thanks, captain, but you can keep your coin, though it is a precious scarce thing now-a-days. It is my resolve to serve you without pay."

"I distrust those who serve for nothing," answered the other, eyeing the speaker suspiciously.

"You may be right, but I have my motives for joining in your game, which I will make clear to you whilst we trot on, if you don't mind, for we are losing so much time here speechifying that Darius will give us the slip. Look at the start he has already."

"That's true," cried the unknown, with flashing eyes. "Come along!"

He quickened his pace after the trooper, who was sauntering towards the spot whence the Bastille had been cleared away. Night had fallen, so that the dog-killer did not perceive he was being followed.

"To begin with," resumed the grenadier, keeping step, "you are to know that I am named Pierre Coignard, and that I was born in Touraine. My good old dad taught me his trade, and I turned out a first-class locksmith. I was engaged to marry the daughter of Loreau, the inn-keeper at Longeais, and I was arranging to set up in business on my own account, in Tours, when there came along a wholesale merchant from Belgium, travelling to buy wine. His man was a red-headed rogue, who never looked you straight in the face, and who could talk the handle off the iron pot in the inn kitchen, where they listened to him in rapture. I do not know what he said to Lucette, but it is one sure thing that they cut away together, one fine day, with the fat Fleming's money-bag. I loved Lucette, and I was going after them when down came the requisition of 1792, and I had to go off in the battalion of our parts for Dumouriez's army. Tired already, officer mine?"

"Not at all; proceed."

"A year ago I enlisted in the Convention grenadiers, and who do you think I met on my first mounting guard in the Hall of Justice? Who but my rival—the thief who had stolen away my bride—this rascal, Darius! He got into the army among brave men by denouncing aristocrats every day. He did not know me again, but I had never forgotten him, or that I would pay my debt to him at the first chance. You want to settle him this evening yourself? Well, I would rather do it myself—but anyway, there's my helping hand."

The other had listened to him inattentively, seeing only the trooper who strolled on before him. He interrupted the grenadier by abruptly saying:

"I do not mean to murder the man, I mean to attack him single-handed."

"I will stand by at the encounter, my gentleman, and you can kill him without me, though the rogue does not deserve so much ceremony. But I may be of some good to you."

"My gentleman" had frowned at being so addressed, and made no answer.

"Come, come, you mistrust me," said Cassius Publicola, "in which

you are wrong. Do you fancy I do not know your secret. Bless you, it needed no conjuror to divine that you were no common sort like me. If I were a spy of the Committee of Public Safety I might readily have had you arrested when the old nobleman recognised you in the court-room."

The stranger scornfully scanned the speaker.

"No, I don't crack myself up as anything great, but I am neither coward nor traitor, and I am avenged by helping you. You see, officer mine, that you may rely on me."

His officer took a score of steps further, before he stopped short like a man making up his mind; he then looked the soldier full in the face, as if to read his soul through his eyes, and said in a broken voice:

"Agreed! anyway, if you betray me, I shall kill you too. Hear me now. This morning I was Viscount Henri Pontis de Sainte-Hélène. Now, the death of the old man whom you saw ascend the scaffold made me the count. In 1791 I went to Spain, whence I returned to try to save him. To-morrow I would have quitted this accursed city again, never to come back save with the lawful sovereign. Such is my vow. But this evening I have a task to perform, one in which you may serve me."

"I am ready."

"I shall attack that wretched ruffian in a lonely spot. Keep your distance and see how it ends. When I kill him, guide me to Sanson's dwelling, for I must speak with him to-night, as I have told you."

"That was agreed, too. Go on."

"But I may die, and if I do, I wish you to act as follows:—Take this seal and purse; the seal is mine, the purse contains five hundred gold pieces. Go this evening to the Rue Saint-Maur, where the Allée Ferdinand runs into it. Enter the corner garden there by a gate always open, and, going up to a summer-house, two storeys high, knock three times on the lowermost window shutters—three knocks with measured intervals, and cry loudly this word: 'Tarragona.' The counter-word 'Rosa Marcen,' will be given within. A woman will open the door. It is my bride, whom I brought to France for my father's blessing on our union. Tell her that I am dead, and show my signet as the token."

"That is settled."

"Escort her back to Spain; she will tell you where. When your mission is accomplished, what is left of the five hundred gold pieces will be yours."

"On the honour of a soldier, I'll do it, noble sir."

His accent was so firm and frank that the count gave him his hand, after the purse and seal. Coignard took it and pressed it.

"Look sharp, my lord!" he cried; "Darius is getting away, and if we linger we run a great risk of losing him."

They had reached the Place de la Bastille, and the trooper was diving into the Rue Saint-Antoine, opposite them to the left. They hastened to make up the distance lost.

"Where the deuce is this dog-sticking villain going to?" muttered Coignard. "It strikes me he is off to join his brigand mates at the Hôtel de Ville, in which case vengeance is over for to-night! But I know where to come upon him in the morning."

"To-morrow I shall be out of Paris. You see I must kill him this night."

"The mischief! we two cannot make head against all Henriot's gang! But mark, my lord, I believe luck is turning."

In sooth, the hussar of the guillotine guards seemed to hesitate. In the direction of the Hôtel de Ville there was the confused din and hubbub of insurrection; a roar of voices, interspersed with gunshots, A reddish glare imitated the sunset in the west. Serious events were evidently in accomplishment on the Place de Grève. Darius was, no doubt, disinclined to mingle in them, for, after some reflection, he turned into the Rue Petit Musc on the left, so as to make for the river.

Pursuit became more difficult. In the main street there were such crowds of curiosity-mongers that Darius could not distinguish two men on his track. But in the narrow byeways about the Arsenal, passers-by were scarce, and he would soon observe his trackers. Luckily the shops were already shut up, and the street lamps were far from dazzling.

Nevertheless, the nobleman and the soldier skirted the walls, and moved warily.

"If he doesn't look back we shall do," whispered Coignard.

"He seems to be intent on keeping an appointment."

Darius reached the water-side, crossed over to the Ile Saint-Louis, and entered the Rue Saint Jacques.

"Wherever is he leading us," muttered Coignard. "I did think he was going to end the night in the tavern of the Bleeding Heart, Rue Calendre, where there is a bit of waste land behind Notre-Dame cathedral useful for you to get through your business, but he is apparently expected elsewhere."

The noble did not reply. He marched on and on with fixed gaze, thinking only of vengeance. Before him flitted all the events of the day: Darius perched on the side of the tumbrel, like a raven on a gibbet. He heard again the ferocious shout—"Drive on, Charlot, with your freight for the knife!" The ruddy arms of the hideous machine gleamed before him, and poor Tarquin's last howl rang in his ears.

The street was quite deserted.

Opposite Saint-Jacques's church Darius turned round several times. The count knocked his sword against a mounting-block.

"Make haste," whispered Coignard.

In a few vigorous strides they shortened the space between game and hunters. It would have been rash to fall on him there, as the guard of the Luxembourg gardens was in earshot. They could only keep him in sight. On the hill-top, by the Val-de-Grace Hospital, it was clear that Darius had found out he was pursued. He halted a moment to take the best course, looking on both sides, and then started off at a run for the bar swung across the street to divide the ward and prevent a charge of cavalry.

"You have long legs, rogue," said the grenadier, "but mine are stouter. Come along, my lord, the quarry is up; let us show ourselves staunch hounds."

The two dashed on in chase. Darius did not gain, but he held his own some thirty paces in advance. After running three minutes beyond

the hospital, where the street takes a turn, he followed it rapidly. Here towered the immense buildings, abandoned by the Capuchins, whose monastery stood near. The principal gateway was open. The fugitive leaped through and plunged into the vast enclosure, planted with large trees, and extending up to the abbey church.

"Halloa, you !" cried Coignard, pressing on not to lose way, "are you going in to pray ?"

"If you like, old mate," rejoined Darius. "Mind you don't burn your fingers at the candles !"

The count ran at full speed, having drawn his hanger. But suddenly the grenadier grasped his arm to check him, and whispered, as he pointed towards the church with the other hand :

"Save your breath ! He's stopped to wait for us."

Against the whitewashed abbey wall a human form stood out, straight and still.

"At bay at last," said the count. "You know what you promised," he added to Coignard. "Do not come on, but let me fight him alone. If I am slain, go straight to the summer-house in the Rue Saint-Maur."

"As you say, my lord ; but keep your eyes open. Darius will stick at nothing."

The count shook his head, and walked directly towards the enemy.

"What do you want ?" croaked the latter.

"To kill you, wretch ! You have a sword ; defend yourself."

"Kill me ? Is it likely ? In this style ? Without any warning ?"

"Yes, to run you through, butcher, as you did that dog, who was worth more than you."

"Ha ! it is the disguised aristocrat ! I had my doubts of you. Well, my pretty cut-throat from Koblenz, I shall serve you like your cur. Not here, though, for I don't care to have your bully take me in the rear."

Whilst speaking, Darius retreated a little to the left, till he was brought up in the recess of a doorway admitting into the long corridor. Behind the trooper's shadow, the archways were faintly visible in the moonlight.

"Come on, if you are coming," sneered he, waving his sabre.

The count advanced prudently, as counselled.

"Are you afraid, defender of the banished king ?"

The count dashed forward so fiercely that his antagonist receded. Coignard could not see them in the lobby, but he heard the traitor sneer : "Come into the cloister, where there's plenty of room. Come on, I say, unless the spectres of the old monks daunt you."

"Have a care !" shouted the grenadier ; "that scamp may have a trick, and ——"

He was cut short by a fearful shriek out of the gloomy corridor, followed by the sharp sound of a trap closing, and a demoniacal laugh *diminuendo*. Then all was hushed.

Pierre had run to the doorway, but remained petrified.

Terror of the unknown—the worst of all—had overcome him. Before visible danger, the soldier of Valmy would not have halted, but his blood was frozen in his veins by the threatening obscurity and the deadly silence succeeding the noisy taunts. It took him some minutes

to recover his coolness, and he was still shuddering when he stepped into the fatal doorway, after a violent effort over himself. In his right hand he vigorously grasped the count's gnarled club, and in his left a spring knife with a large blade. He had carefully buttoned his coat over the count's purse, which would have repelled a bullet. Thus prepared for a combat, the soldier crossed the dreaded threshold, and walked up the lobby with extreme caution.

This was an arched way, so narrow that he could touch the walls by reaching out his arms. He did not take a step without feeling the ground with his cudgel, but the stone floor sounded true everywhere. Nothing came from blows on the walls but splinters of granite. Each blow evoked prolonged echoes, but no human sound. Nothing but phantoms would seem ever to have stalked such an abandoned arcade; and Coignard could almost believe a vision had deceived him.

"But it was no dream," he mused; "that sound of the trap coming to still rings in my ear. Only the guillotine-knife and a trap of a dungeon make such sounds. And the death-cry! Poor count! he has been sent to meet his sire by another road. That finishes their line—their 'house,' as my lord used to say."

So pondering, the searcher reached the end of the corridor. Before him opened the cloister—a courtyard surrounded by arcades.

Though the suppression of religious orders was quite recent, neglect had already made the priestly promenade a ruin. The vaults had given way in places, creepers hung from the walls, and rank grass sprung up amongst the cracked flags.

It was light enough for Coignard to make sure that the cloister had no other outlet than a low door, all but choked-up by fallen stones. By this Darius must have fled.

But by what prodigy had the count been made to disappear?

An intervention of Satan might be believed in, and, though far from naturally superstitious, the adventurer felt for the moment the fear of children alone in the night. His coolness came back at the idea of the real danger he, perhaps, was incurring.

"Darius would never have pitched on such a haunt," he reasoned, "unless it was a den for his brother thieves. If they catch me here, I am a lost man. I had better beat a retreat, and as quick as I can. In the daytime to-morrow I will come and have another look round, to see what has become of the count. Meanwhile, let's be off, to tell the news at the Rue Saint-Maur."

He retraced his steps with the same care and reached the street.

"Hang it all, I was forgetting my hanger! I shall get at least a week in the prison for losing that. Pooh! there must be many ups and downs around the Tuileries. Who can tell if there are any Convention grenadiers now? I am glad of it. I have had my fill of such duty."

With what consolation he could find in these musings, our soldier leisurely descended the Rue Saint-Jacques.

IV.

FIRST LOVE.

It was about ten o'clock now, and it was a long way to the Rue Saint-Maur. So Coignard stepped out briskly whilst brooding over the late strange incidents. Not that he was immeasurably amazed, since the see-saw of that eventful era had familiarised him with unforeseen matters.

He was peculiar himself.

As he had hinted to the young nobleman, he was born on the banks of the river Loire, and nature had amply endowed him with the Gallic wit and sensual proclivities distinguishing the natives of Touraine.

Son of the village locksmith, he had received but a scanty education, but the prodigious occurrences of that age had speedily developed his brain. By two-and-twenty, Coignard had seen enough of men and things to fear naught and long for everything.

He was admirably gifted in a physical sense, having a tall, well-built frame, light brown hair, naturally curling, fair complexion, a straight nose, thick red lips, soft blue eyes full of expression. Altogether, this son of Touraine was a handsome fellow, who could wear with equal fitness a court dress or a general's uniform.

Mentally he was complex. He had a markedly sentimental side, and his first great blow was the loss of his beloved Lucette, stolen away by Darius. But ambition held a greater place in his heart than love; it was a heart capable of grand deeds and evil actions.

His story was short.

At seventeen he arrived in Paris, where he became a most skilful locksmith, for he had ability even as an artisan. Meanwhile he completed his education by hook and crook.

The great levy of 1792 made him a soldier, and during the two campaigns of the Northern Army, he defended his country as bravely as the next soldier. After the battle of Jemappes, his good looks and brightness led to his being selected for the grenadiers of the Convention, an ephemeral picked body.

On the day of our story opening Pierre Coignard still wore its uniform, but he was only awaiting a new field of enterprise, ready to become a dashing captain if military life offered the finest chances, or to pursue fortune in a more tortuous path.

Whilst walking stoutly to the Rue Saint-Maur, the young adventurer believed he was at a crisis when a man's future is at stake.

The strange meeting with an outlaw nobleman, their stranger striking up acquaintance, the romantic mission with which he was charged, all the occurrences of the animated day, those were tokens of a new fortune.

The mission was particularly so, since it was full of charm and peril to guard a woman, conduct her over the border past spies and scaffolds; win her peradventure, wed her and become a grandee of Spain—quite enough here to inflame his young imagination.

Other thoughts followed.

In that purse pressing against his heart were five hundred gold pieces, a fortune in those days. With such a sum, a bold and intelligent man might speculate and speculate until he became a man of millions. The late owner was assuredly dead, and dead men tell no tales that daunt the audacious money-maker.

Reasoning thus, Coignard slackened his pace when nearing the Rue Saint-Maur. The gold against his breast seemed to press heavier, and become scorching hot. For a moment he was inclined to turn his back on that goal and hasten to the Temple. He stopped short.

"No," he muttered. "If I stick to the cash, I must cut away from town. Darius will believe me dead then, and I want him to know that I am very much alive. Let me first save this Spanish woman."

He marched on again, without further delay. The temptation was waved aside, and the purse was as a feather.

The ward he entered was no less deserted than that he quitted. Unpaved, unlighted at that period, the Rue Saint-Maur was a mere road between walled-in kitchen gardens. Here and there artistic iron-work gates guarded the entrance to villas, or *folies*, as they were styled.

But the tempest of Revolution had whirled over that once joyous district. Scaffold and exile had claimed the merrymaking noblemen who had flocked here for revels, and sombre and silent were the gardens.

Coignard had some difficulty in making out the Allée Ferdinand, which the count had mentioned to him.

The street turned just here, and it was hard to tell where an Allée opened. He went down the road, encumbered by rubbish, till he found the Allée and an open gateway. He passed through. A penetrating odour met him, and he fancied he saw a glass glitter in a greenhouse. In a few steps he ran against a house wall: it was a building two storeys high. He had found what he wanted.

Not a ray of light filtered through the air-tight casements, not an issuing sound to ruffle the hush of night.

Coignard halted to consider. His heart throbbed so hard that he could believe he heard each beat.

He groped for the first window, took the count's signet-ring in his hand—it being the token of recognition—and tapped on the shutter three times as directed, calling out in a clear voice:

"Tarragona!"

A suppressed scream responded, and then came the name "Rosa Marcen!" and a hurried sound of steps. A door suddenly flew open, a flood of light illumined the garden, and Coignard, mute with surprise and admiration, recoiled before a marvel of beauty, the woman who stood on the threshold, a candelabrum in her hand.

The grenadier's irradiated face expressed such sincere adoration that the girl was astonished into revealing her own amazement at the newcomer's manly aspect.

Each young and bewitching, the pair gazed in sympathetic wonder.

The girl was arrayed in the picturesque and somewhat gaudy taste of Spain: beads round her neck, rings on her fingers, bracelets and other trinkets beside. The soldier's worn coat and ragged breeches offered a contrast to his quick, reckless, exuberant youth.

At length the latter moved forward a step, and, gracefully bowing, silently held up the count's ring.

"Dead!" breathed the maiden in a hollow voice, drawing back.

The candelabrum dropped from her hand, and all relapsed into gloom. Coignard could believe he was the dupe of a dream. But his eyes became habituated to the shade, and he spied a white figure prone on the vestibule stones. He hastened to raise it, and carry it in through the first door, which, happily, admitted into a plentifully lighted room. After laying his precious burden on a sofa, Coignard knelt down beside her and waited. He had forgotten the true situation of matters, and only thought to contemplate the scarcely earthly beauty. Yet the Spanish girl was so cold and quiet as to seem a marble statue on a tomb. Suddenly she heaved a long-drawn sigh, opened her eyes and clenched hands, and, with a thrill that shook out her dishevelled hair, flung her arms around the soldier's neck.

"Yet, Henri, you are here?" she murmured in a dying voice. But her senses returning to her, she repulsed him violently, and sprang up.

"Who are you?" she threateningly challenged. "What brings you here? Speak! why do you not speak?"

Her voice quivered with feeling, and her eyes shot fire.

"He sent me," answered Coignard, pointing to the coat of arms on the ring, and laying the noble's purse on the table.

"True; I had forgot. Oh, is he dead—dead without saying farewell to me?"

She hid her face in her hands, and burst into tears.

"Alone, all alone in the world!" she sobbed.

Coignard did not attempt consolation, understanding that silence was the due of such deep dolour. Besides, he was still enchanted with her beauty. It was happiness to die, if an angel like this bemoaned one.

"How dearly you loved him," he could not help saying.

At this strange speech the weeper raised her eyes, took a long look at the count's messenger without remark, and finally asked his name in a measured voice.

This strangeness did not startle the soldier. By a rare phenomenon, though these two chance acquaintances uttered a thousand commonplaces, their eyes and bearing spoke more eloquently than their tongues, and they corresponded by a spiritual communication.

"My name is Pierre Coignard, lady," said he sadly, "and I am merely a poor soldier of the Republic. A blessed chance put me in the path of Count Pontis de Sainte-Hélène, who charged me with the errand I am now fulfilling."

"What errand, man?"

"The count was attempting something risky, and told me as we parted: 'If I am not back in two hours, carry this signet to my betrothed, and tell her you await her orders to escort her back to Spain.' The count has not come, and I am ready to obey you."

"Good," said the young lady curtly. "Do you know who I am?"

"A lovely young lady, betrothed to Count de Sainte-Hélène," he answered, timidly.

"Hear me. My name is Rosa Marcen. I am in my sixteenth year. When I was thirteen, Henri de Sainte-Hélène was my father's guest at Tarragona. The old count, who is in prison——"

Coignard started, but hastened to assent: "In prison, ay."

"The old count was companion-in-arms of my father, Don Ramon Marcen. Henri became our guest; I learnt he fled from the French Revolutionists. A year afterwards my father died. On the morrow of the funeral, the Viscount de Sainte-Hélène kissed my hand and asked me to wed him. I was barely fourteen. Besides, what did I know of love? I answered yes, and an old priest affianced us. Eight months subsequently I was in Peru with Henri, who had obtained a captaincy in a Spanish colonial regiment. The news of the execution of the King of France reached us at Lima. We returned to Europe. On our arrival, we learnt that the old count was a prisoner under danger of death. Through a thousand perils, we came to Paris, bent on saving him. Henri swore to send me his family seal, in case of eternal farewell. You bring it me. I understand all, and that I have nothing but death before me."

"Death for you!" cried Pierre, springing up as if to shield her. "Nay, heaven forbids suicide."

She looked at him astonished.

"I do not mean to lay hands on myself," she explained. "I shall go to the Revolutionary high court, and say I am wife of a returned fugitive noble who violated the laws of the Republic. They will find a place for me in the death-cart."

"Lady," replied Coignard, "I am bidden to conduct you into Spain. I shall take you there."

He spoke so firmly that Rosa lowered her eyes and held her peace.

The room in which they were had windows opposite the door. One was open behind them, through which the morning chill came to overpower the heated air. Under the limpid sky a breeze stirred the tall tree-tops. The perfume of the garden stole in to make it a night for love.

"Why should I go to Spain?" remonstrated the girl; "I have no friend or relative there."

"No friend there?"

"Or elsewhere! not one in the world."

"You are too hasty. Why do you believe you have no one to love you?"

Rosa looked disdainfully, not to say scornfully, about her. But the man's fine soft features glowed with an inner flame, which imbued them with the passionate devotion never mistaken by women.

"I am a soldier, too," he said, "and have been in wars. Spain must need fighting men. I am alone in the world, and have undergone pain like yourself."

This pleading, these partial avowals, the offerings of friendship, which were really those of incipient love, roused the Spanish girl's pride; but she had never loved her betrothed, and her wrath faded away under Coignard's supplicatory air. He continued, relating his love for Lucette, and how she had betrayed him. He was eloquent, being enamoured, and that great auxiliary of love, pity, was painted on his auditor's face. Wounded, surprised, charmed as well, reproaching herself for inability to resent this courtship, Rosa listened delightedly to the young soldier.

"Entrust yourself to me," he went on, grasping her hand. "Let us go to Spain, and, if I live, your life shall be one endless feast of happiness,"

"Silence !"

There was a pause, but he soon began again.

"You mean, you could not, did not love him?" whispered he in her ear.

She sprang up to escape the tempter.

"Who? him?" she murmured. Blushing, hiding her face, yet letting Pierre press her hand, her bearing revealed that she had not loved the count, if this new feeling were love. "Loved him!" she added in a dreadful voice in one so young; "had I loved him, I would have already struck you down." A flash shot from her eyes, as she demanded savagely, "By what right do you question me?"

Coignard said nothing. It was clear the woman loved him, and how could he answer?

Aurora lighted up the sky: day was dawning

"Rosa," said the young man tenderly, "to-morrow evening all should be ready for our departure. I will come for your commands, and they shall be carried out, whatever happens."

Keeping her eyes on him, she disengaged her hand. He rose. She followed to see him to the door. Again their hands met for the parting. Her head was near his. He drew her towards him, and breathed her name entreatingly.

She let him enfold her to his heart, and he heard her utter as though uncontrollably:

"Yes, Pierre, I lo——"

Her voice died away. Coignard still clasped her as if he were a statue.

Three distinct knocks were heard on the shutter, and the word "Tarragona" resounded in the stillness of the early morn. It was the voice of the count!

V.

THE HAIRBREADTH ESCAPE.

THE young couple precipitately separated upon this unexpected appeal of a voice seeming to come from the grave.

"Living! living!" growled Coignard angrily.

Rosa had swooned away.

As it was no time to dally, the soldier opened the door to Count Pontis de Sainte-Hélène. His manly form was reddened by the rising sun, as well as his mangled face, torn hands, and tattered clothes—all evidence of a desperate struggle. He was deadly pale, too, and was fain to lean on the borrowed sword, sheathed in its twisted scabbard.

"What, officer, mine!" said Coignard, hastening to support him, "is this really you? Whence come you? are you wounded?"

"Where is she?" interrupted the nobleman.

"The young lady? You will find her hard by—in this house; but as you can readily understand, your voice gave her a turn, and I do not believe she is in a condition to greet you. But let her once behold you, and she will come round all well."

As he spoke, the grenadier helped Sainte-Hélène up the steps.

"Rosa! where are you?" called the latter, without a reply.

The door had remained wide open. The candles had all but burned down in the large candelabra, and their fitful light scantily lit up a white figure at the far end of the room. She had fallen on her knees beside the sofa, clasping her hands, and was pale and immovable, fixing her gaze on vacancy.

"Another woe to deepen all," groaned the count. "Excess of emotion has driven her distracted!" Overcoming his exhaustion, he rushed to his betrothed, took her in his arms, and drew her to his heart. "Rosa!" he appealed, covering her cold face with kisses, "it is I, your Henri! Still no answer? Are you in pain? Speak, I entreat you, in Heaven's name!"

The silent woman appeared enthralled by a strange dream.

"It is the Count de Sainte-Hélène, lady," said Coignard, forcing himself to speak, though choking with suppressed jealousy.

At his voice, the girl raised her head as though its sound called her back into life, and she stared around, bewildered.

"Henri? Is it you indeed?" she faintly said. "Oh, I never hoped to see you."

He had placed her on the sofa, and sat beside her. They remained hand in hand, gazing into each other's eyes, statue-like, enfeebled, speechless. The sole witness looked on with cruel emotion, but not venturing to intervene. The romantic interview which the noble's startling signal had cut short, was of a nature to set the grenadier's brain in a whirl. For the first time in his life, he met a woman immeasurably superior to the ordinary members of her sex, and this woman had admitted her love for him. For an instant he almost believed that chance had blessed him with this marvellous beauty's heart, and with a claim upon fortune. But the vision vanished, since the Count de Sainte-Hélène was alive.

The locksmith's son nearly boiled over with fury at seeing his conquest sitting beside the man whose resuscitation had annulled his hopes, and on the wall seemed written in fire the law which awarded death to returned exiles. Besides, he thought how easily a thrust of his knife would rid him for ever of his rival. On his hand depended the latter's being sent to the scaffold or to death by other steel. He shut his eyes not to see the betrothed in communion, but a finger was laid on his shoulder. It was the count who had come over to him, and was offering his hand.

"I thank you, comrade," his firm, frank voice uttered; "'twas well I knew that grenadier Pierre Coignard could not be a traitor."

This simple speech produced an extraordinary effect upon the soldier; one wholesome breath blew away coward regrets and perfidious suggestions. Coignard blushed under the speaker's loyal look, as if caught red-handed in a crime, and squeezing the proffered hand, he faltered to himself:

"No, no, he could not be that."

Sainte-Hélène did not perceive his confusion. He went to a side-board in a corner for a bottle of topaz-coloured wine, which gleamed in the dying taper-light. His high nature was again evident; his face had resumed its calm and haughty expression. Danger and pain had been repelled by that heroic temperament, as the cliff casts back the breaker.

"A glass of old sherry, grenadier, for us to drink our healths together," he said, filling up a Bohemian bumper, which had probably figured on some dresser in his ancestral manor halls. "Rosa, my dear, come clink glasses with this honest fellow. True hearts are scarce, and I daresay you like them," added he with a smile.

The girl rose and let her eyes fall on Coignard's for the first time since the count's arrival. In their curious gaze, the object believed he read passionate reproach.

"This is sherry of '79, your birth-year, Rosa," continued the lord; "your father poured me out some of this when I reached Tarragona a fugitive. To your health, comrade!"

"To your lordship's," rejoined Coignard, touching glasses, "with the greater pleasure as I nevermore believed to see you."

"True, I had a narrow escape; and it's no fault of the knave we hunted that I am here to drink with you."

"Did you have the consolation of killing him?"

"Unhappily not! I hope you will take that upon yourself."

"I shall have no objection; but not in the Capuchin monastery. I can tell your lordship that my ears still tingle with the shriek you uttered in the corridor, and that I was all over goose-flesh when that trap was dashed to. That villain must be a wizard, burn him!"

"No wizard. I believe him no worse than a counterfeiter; albeit, the Republic does not issue much currency worth imitating."

"There's its paper money, the *assignats*," remarked the grenadier, gravely.

"That's true," said Sainte-Hélène, hardly able to repress a sneering smile. "One thing is certain, the scamp must belong to a gang whose head-quarters are set up in the Catacombs, for no cellars of monks can resemble what I went through."

"The Catacombs! I was down in them once, to put up the gratings when the bones were transported to the cemetery of the Innocents' church," interrupted Coignard; "and I should have believed that you would never have got out, if you ever fell into them."

"I have got out, though; but I lost all hope of ever seeing you more, my darling Rosa," went on the count, raising the Spanish maiden's hand to his lips, though she shuddered and shrank at the contact.

"You might tell me what happened there, my lord, as it may be useful to catch that rogue Darius," said Coignard.

The other did not speak; his countenance became clouded, and tears rolled down his cheeks. The abhorred name of Darius had evoked the memory of the horrid scenes of the day before. The headless body of the old count rose before him, and the delight of seeing his betrothed was displaced by the desire to avenge his father.

"You are right, friend," he said, after a pause. "Before charging you with my task of vengeance, you must know what danger awaits you. You will remember that I had the scoundrel at my sword's point when he disappeared down the long passage?"

"Do I remember? rather! I was just calling out for you to be on your guard, when——"

"At that very moment," said Sainte-Hélène, "the floor gave way under my feet. I felt I was falling through damp air, when all

sensation was extinguished by my head coming down upon a hard substance, and I was senseless. On returning to consciousness, I had much difficulty in finding out what had befallen me. Profound darkness surrounded me, and all I could tell by groping was that the ground was damp and uneven. I must have fallen on a heap of softish earth which had itself dropped from overhead, and was still loose enough to break the shock. I spread out my arms and got up. All my body ached, but I was sure that none of my limbs were broken. By a lucky chance my sword-knot had been rolled round my wrist and the weapon was not lost. My first idea was that the wretch would come to finish me, and so I exulted at being able to defend myself and die like a soldier."

"You are complimenting that rascal Darius too highly, my lord, in believing he would risk his skin in order to kill you."

"In fact, that supposition did not worry me for long. I held my breath and listened; not a single sound came to break the sepulchral stillness oppressing me. I called, but my voice was wasted and did not even awaken a distant echo. I began to comprehend that my doom was the most hideous of all. Hunger would come with its weakening tortures, and there was no need for him who had entrapped me to take steps to slay me sooner."

"On that point you are right, my lord," observed Coignard. "Darius always works by go-betweens. His craft is to inform: he is not so stupid as to do the fighting himself."

"On coming to this conclusion," proceeded the nobleman, "my rage restored me my strength. Stretching out my arms, I had found a wall on either side, but a void before me. I was probably in a high narrow passage, for with my sword I could not touch the roof."

"If in the Catacombs, you could not. The galleries run forty feet high at least; fifty in some places."

"I determined to go forward until there was a break in the floor or a barrier. Instinct, rather than reason, told me that a hollowed out way could not extend very far, though I knew the great quarries themselves spread under Paris to immense distances."

"More than twenty leagues, I have heard tell."

"What had I to fear, however? Nothing that could happen could surpass the horror of my present strait. I offered up a brief prayer and started to pierce the dense opacity. At first, methought, the ground sloped downwards, but soon I found there were regular ups and downs."

"And in the dips your lordship found gaps and holes?"

"Oh, no, the ground was solid everywhere."

"Then you were lucky, believe me, for generally there are bogs and quicksands which swallow up the man entire who gets a foot in."

"I had much difficulty," pursued the count, "to explain the many windings of the tunnel, but after counting a number of turns, I came to the conclusion that I was in a maze of subterranean paths. No doubt they were part of the Catacombs, I thought, and it would be next to impossible to get out without a clue."

"I should say only by a miracle."

"Despair gained on me, and I felt the agony few know of eternal gloom upon me; that compact night actually weighed upon my aching eyelids. I saw sparks and streaks; it was the reverse of the sun's

dazzle. All my thought became concentrated on the single mad desire ; it pressed on my brain and set my temples throbbing. Light ! oh, God, let me see light again ! I fancied that one gleam would mean deliverance, and off I would rush towards an imaginary light as the traveller in the sandy desert towards the lake in a mirage. I cannot tell how long I wandered thus, for all the memory of that doleful march is of a severe pain ; I remember no more, I tell you, after once spying daylight."

"I see how it was, my lord ; you were lucky enough to come out into one of the quarries on the Vanves plain ?"

"No. It was at the turn of a gallery, as I was going to take to the left after fancying that I believed there was a clearer point on my right. Vague, indistinct, I might take it and did, during a minute, for an ocular deception. My heart leapt as if to burst out of my breast, and I feared I should not have strength enough to reach the beacon where life awaited me. Yet I did stumble on and on, leaning against the wall, seeing the light beam more and more clearly. It was day. I sent forth a scream of gladness, and tottered forward faster, extending my arms before me to hug the rays to my bosom. As I stepped out of the full darkness into the twilight, an obstacle caught my foot and I fell."

"A crack, I wager. That's what the quarry-men call a flaw."

"No, it was something more dreadful, which made me recoil in horror when I arose. With its back to the wall, a skeleton was seated, its fleshless head grinning down at its array of bleached bones."

"What an ugly meeting, indeed, my lord."

"A pallid light fell from on high over these sad remains of a fellow-creature. Raising my eyes, I beheld a bluish spot at a height that seemed prodigious to me. It was a patch of sky. I was in the bottom of a shaft which had been the quarry-men's road out, as I could discern holes for footholds from point to point. The hapless mortal, whose remains had been my stumbling-block, had reached this outlet like myself, and strength had failed him to climb so high."

"Another victim of Darius's. When that villain comes to death at the guillotine, whither he has driven so many, he will deserve all he gets."

The count frowned at being again reminded of a painful deed, and only after a pause, went on with the tale.

"Having spied daylight, I felt no more dread or doubts. My powers seemed immense, and my will unconquerable. But the ascent was no easy matter for all that. At least three-score feet separated the soil where I stood from the opening, a perilous and laborious ascent. I should have to climb up like a chimney sweep, taking advantage of every little roughness on the slippery wall. Without you I never should have succeeded, I do believe."

"What had I to do with it, my lord ?" inquired Coignard.

"Without your sword at any rate. It did not slay Darius, but it saved my life."

"Be sure that I am not sorry, though it is badly damaged," remarked the young grenadier. "As for its employment to spite Darius, a pleasure postponed is not lost altogether. But how did it prove so handy, my lord ?"

"It served as a bar, and by driving it into the wall I was able to

attain the mouth of the pit. I was not free then, though, for a solidly set grating closed it. Over and over again I tried uselessly to stir it, and often as I shouted, nobody came. Again it was your blade that relieved me from the living grave. I thrust it between the bars and shook it to and fro till the shining steel attracted a brace of honest rag-pickers who were immensely surprised to see a man dangling under the grating. I daresay they took me for some runaway prisoner, but they did not hesitate about helping me. In ten minutes the pair of them forced the grating up and pulled me out of the gap. It was day-break, and I found myself on the Boulevard de l'Hôpital. I thanked my brave helpers, and came straight hither. Now, comrade Pierre, what think you of my adventure?"

"That it was right to believe your lordship was in the Catacombs. Whew! to drop in underground at the Capuchin monastery and come up at the Jardin des Plantes! I never heard of any monastery rejoicing in cellars so far-reaching."

The Spanish maid had heard the story through without uttering a word, so enthralled seemed she in her meditation, and when the count finished, she merely pressed his hand.

"My dear Rosa, you are ready to drop with fatigue," said the nobleman. "Go and rest. You will need all your strength to-night. Grenadier Coignard, the sun rose an hour ago. It is time for us to be off."

"Off, my lord? whither!"

"Have you forgotten your pledge?"

"Certainly not; I am ready to take you to Sanson's, but it's hazardous, attired as you are, and in the daytime."

Whilst speaking, the soldier of the Republic could not help admiring the peer's energetic temper, which mocked at fatigue as well as danger.

"You are right. I will change my clothes," said he. "Wait for me here and fortify yourself with another glass, for our campaign is far from ended. Come, Rosa."

The girl rose, and passed by the grenadier without a word or sign of farewell, but her black eyes encompassed him wholly, with one of those burning and penetrative glances which enkindle a heart, and set a brain on fire. Coignard leaned against the wall for support.

Rosa Marcen was henceforth his entire life. To see her again was his sole thought; to be her beloved, all his aim.

VI.

THE HOME OF THE HEADSMAN.

THE nobleman and the soldier chatted as they rapidly walked along the untenanted streets, at this period extending from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine to that of the Temple.

The former had repaired the disorder of his clothes. Nobody would have judged from his calm and peaceful countenance that he had escaped the most frightful peril only a few hours before; and his appearance, quite soldierly-like in its propriety, was in

itself an act of rashness when good patriots prided themselves on their rags.

"Let me tell your lordship that we are not very prudent in our proceedings," remonstrated the grenadier.

"Are you afraid? There is still time to quit me; I daresay I can find Sanson's alone."

"I am in no fear about myself. I risk nothing worth mentioning. It is your lordship I am worried about."

"What have I to lose? my life! Do you think a man under the ban rates that highly?"

"I should, in your lordship's place."

The nobleman sneered, as Pierre Coignard hesitatingly pursued:

"Were you to fall into the grip of Darius's companions, what would become of the young lady?"

"On coming to Paris, Rosa was well aware that I braved death. She is a soldier's daughter, and he transmitted to her virile courage and iron will. Rosa will avenge me. Besides, I confided her to you. If I die, you have my instructions, and I have your pledge. You will take her to Spain."

Coignard turned red, despite himself, to hear this. He felt that he was no longer worthy of such absolute confidence.

"Have your own way, my lord," he said presently; "but I really hope you will not thus need me, though you are tempting Old Nick himself, as the saying goes."

"Do you mistrust the man we are going to see?"

"Old Sanson? No, surely. He thinks too well of the lords to denounce any of them; but I fear his assistants. There is one rogue in the band who would collar any such himself to have the pleasure of guillotining him. He's a friend of that Darius fellow, and one of his kidney, you see. If he recognizes your lordship, he will not make a long job of it."

"I only wish to speak alone with Sanson, and I have little to say."

"Speak to him alone," repeated Coignard, shaking his head. "That's not so easy as you imagine; and at this time o' day he may possibly refuse to receive us. If I were by myself, he knowing me by sight, and they taking my coat as my passport, I might manage it; but your business is not mine, my lord, and you have let me into too many of your private matters for me to seek to know any more."

"Why should I not tell you, inasmuch as you are useful to me?"

"On my faith, my lord, out with them then! one more or less little matters. Do as you please! I can be still more devoted to keep pace with your trust, and you would do wrong to be burdened."

"When I once trust a man I hide nothing from him. What I want to ask Sanson is this: You saw my father meet his death last evening. He had the family papers upon him; and, as the last of my line, I cannot let all its history perish with him. I must have those documents, though they cost me twenty times their weight in gold; and the executioner alone can restore me them."

"Papers!" repeated Coignard. "Don't hope any such thing, my lord. The police take care of all papers. If it were jewellery, it would be another matter. They are the headsmen's perquisites."

"The documents I seek are fastened up in a gold reliquary, always worn by my father."

"Do you think he was able to retain it up to the last?"

"I am sure of that, for I saw it glitter on his bosom yesterday as he was driven to the scaffold."

"That's a different thing, and Sanson ought to have it. Only take my advice, my lord. Don't ride the high horse with Sanson. He is proud, and does not need money; so if you talk about payment—off-handedly, you know—he's just the man to take offence. It's my opinion that you must be careful of what you say."

"Yes; I know that this man is better than his masters. They would not pardon the sire, but he may have pity for the son."

"We are nearly on the spot, my lord count, for there's the Faubourg du Temple, and I can see the tall trees in Sanson's garden from here."

The two had reached the corner of the Rue Neuve-Saint-Jean (called to-day Rue du Château-d'Eau). About the middle of this long thoroughfare rose a high wall, over which aged elms towered from behind. A broad, high gateway, almost always closed, gave entrance between mossy columns to a spacious yard, surrounded by large, gloomy buildings. It was the residence of that old family of executioners which had its legend, history, and punning heraldic arms. Since the Reign of Terror, the heretofore silent and deserted mansion had become so noisily animated as to have pointed itself out to the count, had he not been guided.

Early as it was, on this day in particular, unusual bustle prevailed about the accursed abode. Half-a-dozen carts stood before the widely-opened doors, and an inquisitive gathering increased around these preliminary objects.

"What in thunder is the riot about?" queried Coignard. "This is not the hour for the drive to the Place du Trône-Renversé. There must be something new, surely."

"If we get there, we shall learn," said Sainte-Hélène, simply.

Neither had any idea of the serious events accomplished since the previous evening.

The news of the downfall of the Mountain party stirred Paris to its innermost recesses. From the Hôtel de Ville to the working districts, the populace, greedy for change and sickened of slaughter, rushed into the streets to bluntly interchange their sentiments. The varied shouts which are the speech of mobs, already struck upon the ears of Coignard and the nobleman, and on coming up with the throng, they soon found out whither things were tending.

"I say, Jacquot, isn't this your last trip?" queried a boy of a man in a red waistcoat, smoking his pipe on one of the carts.

"Don't you be in a hurry to believe that, you saucy brat," returned the executioner's man. "There'll always be room for a worm like you in the 'salad basket.'"

"Thank you, I am not over eager. But, whilst you wait for me, better take your old scarecrow gibbet to pieces, eh, old Jacquot."

"Jacquot!" said Coignard in a low tone, "there you have the very varlet I was telling you about. Darius's friend, you know."

"Maybe we shall have to, youngster," rejoined the man in the red

smock, "but it will not be long idle, never fear. We are only going to bring it from the Trône to the Place de la Révolution, coming back to her old home, the dear old head-biting-off-widow-maker, bless her!"

"Ay, and at five o'clock this afternoon she will marry citizen Robespierre."

The count started at this name, on which was concentrated all the hatred of the conquering party, and his companion reflected on the consequences of this turn of the scales for a simple grenadier like him.

The two cut through the press with that decisive bearing and air of authority which always secures room. Probably Pontis de Sainte-Hélène was taken to be a delegate of the Convention charged with an order for the headsman and Coignard for an escort of his. So they penetrated unhindered to the very middle of a large square yard preceding a garden shaded by old trees. On the left hand extended the large outhouses to store away the instrument of decapitation which, for eighteen months, had remained upon the public Place. On the other hand the one-storey dwelling houses were dull and quiet amid the hubbub.

"Can citizen Sanson be seen?" asked Coignard of a man crossing the yard.

"You've hit on a bad time, citizen grenadier," was the reply. "It is six o'clock. We are just starting for the Trône-Renversé, and yet by nine we have got to be on the Place de la Révolution, though we have a long round to go. Sanson's too busy to chatter with you unless you come on business of the citizen representatives."

"Now you have it," Coignard hastened to say, understanding that boldness would win the point.

"Then, come this way, citizen. Sanson is in the low room."

The nobleman, in whose eyes glowed a sullen fire, followed the grenadier who deliberately crossed the threshold of a narrow door and dived into a long passage on the left.

He seemed to know the house perfectly well, and experienced none of the heart-rending emotion of his companion, in passing into the dreaded dwelling.

A sad, gentle-faced old man sat at a large oaken table strewn with papers, in a vast hall feebly lighted by narrow windows. He was attentively reading a large sheet of writing sealed with red wax, probably an order of execution.

Sainte-Hélène could not refrain from shuddering to think that, on the eve before conducting his father to his doom, Sanson had read his name on a similar list.

On seeing two strangers, the old headsman of the Republic rose and inquired the count's business with grave politeness, and in a soft voice which greatly contrasted with his tall stature and robust aspect.

"I am the son of one of those you beheaded yesterday," replied Sainte-Hélène, after some hesitation.

Sanson started in sorrowful surprise, and sympathetic pity beamed in his look.

"I have a request to make you," continued the nobleman, bluntly.

"If I can carry out your wish without failing in my duty, you may rely on me, my lord. I mean, citizen," returned Sanson, almost respectfully, having judged the social rank of his visitor.

"When my father met his death," proceeded the latter, in a quiver-

ing voice, "he wore a family jewel on his breast, which I much desire. I know that the appurtenances of the condemned belong to the executioner, and hence I am prepared to redeem the trinket by any sum you value it at. My father's name——"

"Name him not, citizen," interrupted old Sanson, his features clouding as he listened. "I need not hear it, I cannot restore you the article."

"Why not?" exclaimed the noble almost threateningly.

"Because you are mistaken, citizen; the belongings of executed men are not my property, but that of the Republic."

"Ha! does the Republic inherit from those it kills?" sneered Pontis de Sainte-Hélène bitterly.

"The remains are taken to the Picpus Convent Cemetery," responded the public officer sternly; "the garments turned over to the hospitals, and money and valuables deposited with the Paris city treasurer."

"That's so," interpolated Coignard, "and I wonder why I did not think of it. When I was on guard at the Hôtel de Ville I often saw Sanson's first assistant, Desmorets, crossing the Saint-Jean hall, in order to hand a box of jewellery and the like to the Common Council clerk."

The count mused bitterly on the Revolution, after taking away his rank and fortune, robbing him of his birth certificate and family deeds. Despair was so clearly expressed by his contracted features that Sanson felt profoundly moved. Though he had seen so many deaths, he was softened by this manly grief thus manfully controlled, and it was he who had moist eyes.

"What, have you a heart?" queried the count, hoarsely.

Sanson bowed his head to the sarcasm, paused ere replying, and then answered:

"Every night I pray to Heaven for the repose of those I am compelled to deprive of life. But you must excuse me from hearing you any longer, citizens," he went on, calmly. "It is six o'clock, and I am obliged to go and attend to orders in hand."

"Let us be off, my lord," whispered Coignard. "Sanson has only spoken the truth, and we can do no good here."

A few minutes afterwards the two visitors passed through the court-yard gateway, and mechanically turned towards the Rue Saint-Maur. The nobleman walked with hanging head, like one overburdened by painful thoughts, and Coignard followed him silently. They thus reached the entrance of that street, when the leader abruptly stopped, and, taking from his pocket a roll of coin, offered it to the grenadier, saying:

"The hour of our parting has come. Take this gold. I shall always remain under an obligation to you, and so it is not given in payment. But your Republic pays its troops badly, and a few gold pieces will not be useless in your hunting up Darius to avenge us, and in finding your Lucette."

"Lucette! I am not thinking of her now," muttered Coignard, holding back.

"Take it, however," persisted Pontis, forcing the money upon him, "and now—one shake of the hand, and we'll say good-bye!"

The grenadier took the hand, and said gruesomely:

"Thanks, my lord, thanks. But am I never to see you again?"

"Never in this accursed city. But if you come to Spain, ask for Don Henri Pontis, captain in the American Dragoons, and try to find me. My house will be always open to you."

"So you will start to-morrow, my lord?"

"Not to-morrow, but this very night."

"Do you not fear to travel with the young lady?" questioned the young grenadier haltingly.

"We shall reach Spain by water; I have a vessel waiting at Havre."

He seemed fretful, while the grenadier, embarrassed, would not take his leave.

"My lord," he broke out, like a man suddenly coming to a decision, "are you much set on that jewel?"

"I would give all I possess to carry it with me."

"You strongly wish to have it, eh?"

"You are out of your wits. Do you fancy the city government would restore title deeds to an exiled noble whom it would guillotine if he was its prisoner?"

"It would not restore it, true, but it might be taken from it."

"By whom?"

"I."

"You! you are mad, I tell you. Did I not make it clear that I should be out of Paris to-morrow?"

"I know that. It is this very night you shall have your jewel."

"This is more mad still. How can you hope to wrest it away?"

"Ah, that's my secret, my lord."

"If you accomplish this," said Pontis, slowly, "you may have from me all one man can ask of another."

"We'll talk about that another time. At present, two questions only."

"Speak."

"What is this jewel like—this reliquor, or reliquary, as you call it?"

"It is a present received from a Greek Emperor by Gontran Pontis, who was one of the second crusaders. It is in the shape of a flat, square box, of massy gold, set with rubies, roughly bevelled at the four corners. It opens by a secret spring, acted upon by pressing an emerald in the top of the lid. It contains two parchments folded up in a scarlet silk wrapper."

"Good! there's no mistaking that. Now, where am I to find you to-night?"

"Up to midnight in the summer-house of the Rue Saint-Maur."

"After that?"

"At the extremity of the Ile des Cygnes, facing Grenelle plain. The ferryman of the island is an old family servant. He has a boat ready there to take me down the river to Rouen."

"At what hour do you start?"

"Before daybreak."

"That's about half-past three. I can get to the islet by three."

"How shall I know you have come?"

"I shall signal three times with this," rejoined the soldier, showing

a silver whistle which had once belonged to a gamekeeper in his part of the country.

"'Tis well. If I hear the whistle, I shall send the ferryman to the mainland for you."

"That's settled, my lord."

"Quite. Be wary, and God help you!"

"Rest assured of me, my lord. Before three to-morrow morning you shall have the article."

"But if you do not come by three o'clock?"

"Then, my lord, go your way with the young lady, and now and then give a thought to the grenadier with whom you condescended to clasp hands. If Pierre Coignard be not at the islet by three in the morning, then consider him dead."

VII.

THE DUEL ON THE HOUSETOP.

PIERRE COIGNARD'S battalion was on guard at the Tuileries, and the grenadier naturally proceeded in that direction on parting with the son of the guillotined noble. He thoughtfully followed the long line of the Boulevards in not the least hurry to report himself at quarters. Moreover, all his engrossing reflections were of the one kind.

In the first place the news learnt at Sanson's door was calculated greatly to influence his future intentions, and he concluded that it was high time haply to drop the military harness. Service without profit or glory was not tempting to our wily child of Touraine, and much better chances might be held out in the various changes in the Government. With the innate instinct of ambitious souls, he caught a glimpse of more than one occasion to make his fortune, and he decided to see how events turned out.

To begin with, instead of joining his company, he went into the Rue de la Loi, the name for the time being of the Rue de Richelieu, stopped before one of those dark, lofty houses yet visible around the Palais-Royal, and boldly stepped into the narrow side-passages.

The Convention grenadiers, specially charged with guarding the National Assembly, enjoyed complete freedom outside their service, and Coignard had kept on at the lodgings taken when he worked at his trade. It was a garret of the ancient mansion at the corner of the Rue des Filles-Saint-Thomas. There were stored his locksmith's tools and plain dress which he donned to go to the dancing resorts, for our man of Tours was fond of such capers, and too conceited to figure in a private soldier's uniform.

He wished to devote the day to the rest necessary after the nocturnal emotions, and mainly to consider his position. It was a very odd situation to be in, and it was hard to believe that he had not dreamt the queer adventures in which he was mixed up.

Amid all the muddled impressions there was one luminous form that rose up clearly—that of the splendidly lovely young Spaniard, whom he had for an instant embraced. Again he heard that enchanting voice

beginning the never-finished phrase : "I love you !" and he considered that it would be sweet to die for such a beauty.

Under the leaky attic roof the young soldier dreamed of the old palace in Tarragona, where Rosa would go to dwell with the noble whose life he held in his hand.

"To think that it is for that man I am going to risk my neck to-night !" he hissed between his teeth. He sprang to his feet and strode up and down. "Yes, but I shall see her once more," he added, beating his brow. "To give me the excuse to see her, speak to her, hear her, perhaps touch her hand, I must have that box. If I do not obtain it, she will despise me."

He plunged again into reverie.

"I will have it !" he cried all at once in that sharp voice, always indicating an energetic resolve. "I have ten hours before me. Eight for sleep and two to make ready is more than is needed."

With the rapidity of decision belonging to men of action, he flung himself on the bed and went off to sleep. Great generals and notorious robbers alone possess this precious faculty of commanding slumber, so it is said.

Coignard was one who could sleep at will, and he only awoke at nightfall.

His preparatives were short. Out of a cupboard he took a remnant of a pasty and a bottle of wine, of which he partook frugally—just enough to give him strength and not to oppress him. He took his bunch of picklocks and keys, a knotted rope, a dark lantern, and a sulphur match and steel. In his pockets he put his spring-knife and a loaded pistol separately, covered his uniform with the regulation grey overcoat, and went down-stairs out into the street, whistling the Marseillaise.

It was a long walk from the Rue de la Loi to the Place de Grève, so that our daring friend had plenty of leisure to think out the hazardous enterprise he was about essaying. He had no set plan, but he relied on his strength, skill, and good luck. Besides, his perfect knowledge of the ground doubled his chances of success.

The Convention grenadiers were often on duty in the Hôtel de Ville, and hence all the ins and outs of the old municipal headquarters were familiar to Coignard.

There were few of the halls where he had not spent long hours on guard, few staircases which he had not mounted and descended, and, moreover, nature had endowed him with a valuable gift for a soldier—and a burglar—the bump of locality.

Once going through a house made it so well-known to him that he could sketch the ground plan with as much precision as an architect.

Hence, though he had never penetrated into the store-room of the property of the condemned, he was not at all puzzled about his way thither. It was enough that he had sometimes seen Sanson's first assistant bringing the box containing the ghastly collection of the day for the custodian's safe-keeping, to know the exact site of the melancholy treasury. This was the very thing that prompted him to offer his services to the Count de Sainte-Hélène.

As for the means of entering the stores, he possessed excellent tools, practice in using them, rare skill, and exceptional strength.

One detail of the operation puzzled him, however. To get into the Hôtel de Ville was no easy matter, particularly in the night-time. It was much easier to slip in by day and hide away there, but after sunset the doors were closed, and Henriot's gunners watched around the edifice.

Coignard reckoned on cunning, to seduce some sentry with the bottle, and he was going to review all the soldiers till he came to a friendly face. To his great surprise, he found the Place de Grève absolutely deserted.

The every-day groups of armed men were nowhere, and, still more strange, access to the building was free. The grated doors were broken through, wrenched away or twisted out of place, so as no longer to be any protection. The main doorway yawned unwatched and silent, and the broad slabs of the passage resounded under the grenadier's foot like the pavement of the cloister of the Capuchin monastery.

"Hang it all!" growled the stupefied intruder, "is this the castle of the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood? Where in thunder have they all gone, soldiers, gunners, and the rest of the forces?"

His astonishment did not last. A little thought sufficed to reveal the amazing events of the last two days. On the evening, here had been the headquarters of the insurrection, the fortress where the city authorities entrenched themselves, and, lastly, the battlefield where the leaders of the Mountain had been crushed. Evidently the building had been left to itself when the victims of the 9th of Thermidor were dragged away to the Convention about three in the morning.

Traces of the conflict were everywhere. Broken weapons, shreds of clothes, and torn proclamations carpeted the grand staircase. The walls were splashed with mud and gore. It was like an assaulted redoubt abandoned by the storming party after the capture.

"Beyond dispute," thought the grenadier, "luck is on my side, and I can get on with my work without any bother. My name's not Pierre Coignard if I do not bring away my lord's trumpery. And if the lovely Spaniard does not love me for my pains, then I am a fool!" he added, grinding his teeth as he resolutely climbed the grand stairway.

Night had closed in and the darkness was complete. But the invader knew his road clearly, and he readily reached the grand hall, so well known to him, in which the Council held its sessions. He stopped there to listen and get his new starting point. The stillness was profound. He remembered that his road ought to run from the farther end of the hall up two storeys by a rather narrow stair. The store-room was placed under the roof. Its door was on a long passage which Coignard had often paced from end to end, lighted by a skylight overlooking the inner yard.

"Ought I to light my lantern?" he queried, thinking aloud. "No; that would not be prudent. It will be time enough when I have to tackle the lock."

He went all round the hall by feeling the walls, found the door without over much trouble, and began to go up the dark stairs. He had ascended a dozen steps or so when it struck him that the walls were singularly resonant. The sound of every step he took seemed repeated on the next storey till he suspected that somebody was preceding him. He stopped, and the steps ceased instantly.

"Nonsense!" he thought; "if a man were in front of me he would not halt because I did. It is an echo."

In five minutes he was on the landing, where he lent ear again, but could hear nothing.

"I had a bee in my bonnet, that's about it," he said. "But here's the corridor, and I must have a good look round."

Taking out a gunflint and the wick steeped in brimstone, he set to striking the steel. The first flicker of the bluish flame dubiously lit up a long lobby, and what he took to be a human figure gliding along the wall. It was so brief a glimpse that he might rather conjecture it the play of shadows on the stone. At the moment, however, the adventurer little heeded apparitions, real or imaginary. He was at the crisis of his expedition, and he concentrated all his wits on the problem of reaching the treasure.

With the lighted lantern held up, he explored the corridor. On the right were many high, narrow doors at intervals; each of the five first had a number, and "ARCHIVES" painted on it in black. On the sixth Coignard read with emotion this significant label—"Stores of the Clerk of the Council." This door protecting the treasure of the guillotine was studded and barred with iron, and rejoiced in a metal sheathing, as well as a huge lock embedded in a thick oaken casing, which seemed to defy the housebreaker. Before this excess of defence Coignard felt almost disheartened.

"There's one that will 'gap' every chisel I have and blunt the rest," he grumbled. "But it will never do to give it up so. I must get in there or renounce seeing the Spanish beauty again. I haven't any time to spare either, which makes it bad, for it will take all of half-a-dozen hours to cleave through such a barrier. It will be ten o'clock very soon, and the count will fly away with the lady from the Ile des Cygnes at morn. By thunder, I'd like to set fire to the door! Yes, and have the crowd see it from the Place and rush in on me. A pretty idea that!"

After having anathematised his misleading star, our soldier fell into a brown study. It was so deep that he utterly lost the sentiment of time, and stood fully twenty minutes, cooling his forehead against the unassailable door, as if paralysed by his impotency.

The whiz and buzz of the great clock striking the hour recalled him to reality and restored his energy. He drew himself up, muttering:

"I must be very fond of that girl to be such an ass. If the door is too strong, how about the window? Come along on the back track, and look sharp!"

Picking up his lantern, he walked deliberately to the end of the corridor, where there was a winding staircase, which took him up and out upon a small platform. He was on the roof.

The plan was most simple which sudden reflection had inspired in Coignard. The store-room was probably lighted from above, and it was likely also that the way in there was not so elaborately guarded. To find the corresponding window, he would only have to count those in the *mansardes*, or elevated attic-rooms.

It was a warm, clear summer night, and by the pale starlight Coignard could make out the plan of the roof well enough. On the north side it ended abruptly. On the other hand, the crest formed a broad

enough way for the foot to tread, and on the slopes the attic windows stood out. They were twelve in number, and Coignard reckoned the seventh to be the one he wanted. To reach it along the roof-keel was easy enough; and in an instant the grenadier had accomplished this, and was exactly over the window.

Here the enterprise grew thorny. The roof was of lead, and very slippery from dew; bold as the man was, he did not deem it possible to creep down. He adopted another plan requiring as much skill as firmness of mind. After measuring the distance and carefully choosing the line, he lay down on his back and let himself slide. A deviation of a few inches either side would have shot him over to certain death, but he was fortunate enough to hit it off accurately, and in a couple of seconds was stopped by the ridge of the window-shelter. It took scarce an instant to descend to the window ledge and lean over to discover that the glazed light he saw was guarded by an iron grating. An unexpected hindrance, but our ex-locksmith had not come so far to be balked by this. He tranquilly opened his kit, took out a file and a pair of pincers and went to work. Though it was awkward in this overhanging position, it was not a protracted task. In less than three-quarters of an hour he had the bars cut free.

The rest was child's-play.

Coignard fastened his rope to the stump of a bar, flung the other end within the room, and with his lantern suspended from round his neck, slung himself down over into the same place and lowered himself some twenty feet beneath the light, where his feet touched the floor.

His plan had succeeded.

He had penetrated without mishap into the store-room though fortified like a citadel, and he felt proud as he trod the sanctuary inaccessible to timorous souls.

"Could she see me now," he muttered, "she would know that I have no fears about my neck, and that a plain son of Touraine is worth her high and mighty runaway noble."

Time was precious, and he hastened to make the best use of it.

He was in a strange place, a square room surrounded by shelves, and they divided off. By his lantern's dim light he saw jewellery of all shapes and kinds gleaming around him: watches, rings, bracelets, and necklaces. He reviewed the whole collection, casting rays on the yellow gold and the sparkling diamonds. But the soldier did not experience the passing temptation before this wealth which had seized him when he was carrying the supposed dead noble's purse to the Rue Saint-Maur. The remembrance of the beheaded owners was what defended the unhallowed hoard, and he could hardly dispel superstitious awe in the museum of horror. It was kept in good order, each compartment being dated, nearly all recent, for earlier collections had been sold, so that Coignard had merely to follow the rows to find what he sought.

On the last label, he read: "9 Thermidor." It was the gleanings of the crop when the reliquary had fallen into the executioner's hands.

Before the jewel for which he had risked his life, Coignard's scruples vanished. He snatched it up, and scanned it closely. It was a marvellous Greek work of the Middle Ages, and its artistic value was superior to its intrinsic one.

"Dence take me but I understand why he should think a deal of his little box ! It is worth my pay for a score years, to say nothing of what it may contain. May ? Why not see if it does contain anything ?"

Unhesitatingly he pressed the central emerald, and up flew the lid, discovering yellow papers which Coignard hastened to study. They were a family tree of the house of Pontis, the count's baptismal certificate, and an extract from the Tarragona register attesting the lawful betrothal of Don Henri Pontis to Donna Rosa Mercedes Marcen. An inward conflict marked the grenadier's features as he examined the deeds on which rested the legal existence of the new Count de Sainte-Hélène.

"Just because I am only Pierre Coignard," he growled, "I do not carry any coats of arms on sheepskin, and for the want of them I cannot marry any Donna Rosa. Never mind, men have won their wishes without such rubbish," he added, returning the parchments to their receptacle, which he shut up and put in his coat pocket. "Now for the *Ile des Cygnes*."

The ascent presented more difficulties than the descent, but Coignard speedily overcame them and was once more astride on the attic window crest. To gain the roof ridge from there was the most dangerous part of the return.

To mount the smooth leads the grenadier had to drive chisels in, and drag himself up with as much help as his knees and elbows could give him. He rose slowly but surely, and soon grasped the ledge with both hands. He had but to make the last upward movement to place himself on the narrow top.

At the very moment when he almost attained the point, his head came violently in contact with another man's who was climbing the opposite slope. The shock was so unexpected and severe that the bold soldier let go both hands and slid rapidly down. Twenty feet below the steep roof terminated in a stone gutter. Drawn along by an irresistible force, the grenadier tried vainly to check himself in this hollow smoother than marble. He was half over when he just obtained a hold so as to hang above the abyss. He felt lost.

His legs swung to and fro ; his own weight seemed enormous on his arms, and his chest cracked with the effort to regain the inward position. Yet, in spite of all the horror of his position, Coignard had not lost his senses. He remembered quite clearly that a man had hurled him back—one who could only be an enemy.

"He'll come down and finish me," he thought. "I am a dead man. I shall never more see Rosa."

He scanned all of the roof that was visible, but no human form appeared on the ridge, and the deep calmness of night was alone broken by the caws of several rooks startled by his fall. Hanging on to the gutter with desperate vigour, the wretched man felt that he would be saved if his knees were once upon the stone. As supple as he was robust, Pierre had in youth clambered over all the cliffs and climbed all the trees about his native village.

He began by raising his left leg slowly, and his knee almost touched the edge, when a sharp twinge, followed by a general numbness, paralysed the movement. His limb remained inert not two inches from the gutter.

"The cramp!" groaned the hapless soldier.

All seemed at an end now.

But Coignard had met with the same ailment before when swimming, and he knew that stretching out the limb and letting it remain extended was the only remedy in his situation. He straightened the leg downward, allowed it to hang, and waited.

Would he be able to wait long?

Seconds were centuries; and with unspeakable horror he had to acknowledge that his rigid elbows were gradually relaxing. For an instant he glanced below. His hair rose on end. Giddiness, that madness of the abyss, stole over him by degrees. The black gulf attracted him below, and he fancied the old building yielded and reeled over the depths with him.

Death appeared as a deliverance.

He was going to let go and drop into space when he felt the sharp corner of the reliquary press against his breast. It saved him, for the image of the lovely Spanish maid suddenly called up restored his hope and courage. He collected all the powers left him to hold out a while longer. The numbness had gone off, and he succeeded at length in getting one knee up over the ledge. He was safe, unless the man who had hurled him from the top came down to push him over.

On returning to life, Coignard had recovered all his coolness. Without a cry of joy or sigh of relief, without one useless gesture or movement, he lay down in the hollow and commenced crawling towards the staircase-head.

At times he stopped to lift his head and glance up, but he descried nothing. His all but murderer had disappeared like a phantom. Thus he dragged himself to the far end of the cornice, where he attempted anew to scale the slope, believing he had baffled his foe. It was a dreadful ascent—between two precipices, beside and beneath—to meet an unknown danger. After a few efforts he reached the top, and found himself once more at the head of the stairway which had brought him out on the roof. The knife between his teeth and the pistol in his belt had not been required. When he set foot on the platform where his perilous trip had begun, he quivered with gladness.

"By thunder! I saved myself by the skin of my teeth!" he said aloud. "They may well say lovers have a special Providence. I have got the prize. I must fly straight to Grenelle. Yet I would like to know what villain gave me that shove. It's no fault of his that I did not measure the court-yard pavement with my length. Where the mischief can he have got to?"

Whilst saying this, our soldier looked warily about him. At first he perceived nothing suspicious, and he was starting to go down with the regret that he left an unseen enemy in his rear. But, continuing to sound the dark corners of the uneven roof with his eye, he at last distinguished the regular projections, and, at the end of the uppermost crest, at the foot of a tall chimney, he believed he saw a dark figure, motionless. Redoubling his attention, it seemed that the figure stirred.

"Aha!" he growled; "is the villain who tried to kill me waiting for me to go below, that he may attack me from behind? It's clear there is a man there; and the city authorities are not in the habit of

posting sentinels upon the housetops. I haven't the time to waste, yet I must know what he's like. I think I can manage that."

The grenadier had recourse to strategy. He entered within the stair-head shelter, descended a few steps, and then waited. His eyes were on the level of the roof, the rest of his person being completely under cover. From this ingeniously-chosen post he could see without being seen—and he did look with all his eyes. He was not kept waiting long.

The shadowy form left the chimney and cautiously commenced to step along the narrow path on the roof-top. It was indeed a man, though the twilight gave him a fantastic appearance. By a natural effect in perspective, he loomed up gigantic to Coignard who saw him from below, and he seemed to increase in bulk as he neared him.

"I see their plan," muttered the grenadier; "they've picked out their biggest man to cut off the retreat, and the others lie in wait below. I am caught!"

All the hopes of the amorous son of Mars fled together. After having miraculously escaped death, he found himself taken red-handed as a thief, and he shuddered with rage at the prospect of never more seeing the Spanish beauty.

"I shall fall on a corporal's guard in the lobby," he reasoned. "Here I am pitted against their champion alone. I can't help the wish to fling him into the courtyard where he tried to send me. I might be able to find some other way down."

The phantom was not a dozen paces off, and a metallic ray seemed to shine from him in the starlight.

"He is armed," continued the man in ambush, "that makes it worse still, but, anyhow, I prefer to fight where there's elbow-room."

In one bound he mounted the staircase, and stepped out on the level ridge. Without losing a moment, he put himself on guard with his knife and cocked his pistol. The onslaught never came. Instead of it, the man stopped short, wheeled round, and retraced his steps; but he went back a good deal quicker than he came.

"Come, come, their Goliath is not a brave man," muttered Coignard. "If this is the game, I shall have to run him to bay."

He started in pursuit of the phantom along the narrow footway, full of peril, where he needed all his coolness and skill to keep his balance. His weapons greatly burdened him, and he doubted that he could do much fighting on such a field, but he had gone too far to turn back.

"I cannot help myself," he thought. "Besides, this chap shows more of the white feather than I do."

Truth to say, the stranger did hurry on his retreat, and appeared glad enough to hide in his former ambush among the chimney-pots.

"Humph!" growled Pierre, "a curious dodge! is this cat on the tiles trying to play some trick in the Darius style? Since that trap in the Capuchin monastery, I have no faith in fellows who run away when encountered."

Under the influence of this ugly memory, the pursuer stopped to examine the place. He had gone past the attics, and was entering on an unexplored region. The roof beyond the chimney-stack serving as his foeman's stronghold was unknown to Coignard.

He wrapped his handkerchief round his knife and hand to secure

the weapon, and resolutely proceeded, sustained by a rage which augmented his strength. At the identical instant when he plunged into the zone of shadow of the dreaded chimney-stack, the hunted man turned the base of the masonry and disappeared.

"Oho!" cried Coignard, feeling that the critical juncture had come, "it's hide-and-seek, is it? I shall catch you without much running, my fine hero!"

Nobody answered him.

The grenadier stepped softly upon the narrow ledge running round the whole stack of chimneys. At the angle he bent the knee, gathered himself well in hand, so to say, and with his arm raised to stab he abruptly rounded the mass. There was not a soul to be seen!

"A thousand thunders! this must be Old Nick!" he swore.

He listened and peered; there was nothing but stillness and vacancy.

"Come out, you cur!" he burst forth in fury. "You've sneaked into some hole, have you, you spy! Just let me know where you are, and I'll——"

He did not finish the sentence, for an ominous laugh rang over his head, and almost at the same time a dreadful shock felled him. Crushed as by an enormous weight, the grenadier believed the chimney had fallen upon him. A sharp pang restored him to reality.

A man kneeling on his chest had stabbed him in the shoulder, and was lifting his steel to deal a finishing stroke. Coignard could only parry it with his left hand, and surround his unknown enemy's neck with his right, so as to draw him to him with superhuman vigour. Thus the man's face was brought so close as almost to brush Coignard's.

Two exclamations of fury and surprise rose together. The antagonists recognised one another.

"Darius!"

"Cassius Publicola!"

The words rang out as a defiance and a threat.

"Ha, cut-throat, I have you now!" ejaculated Coignard.

"The grenadier! I'm done for!" gasped the other, trying to crawl out of the strangling embrace.

Despite the advantage given by the unexpected attack, the revolutionist did not maintain the upper hand. In leaping upon Coignard from the chimney-top he hoped to kill him on the spot, but he had missed his aim. His dagger had grazed the shoulder, not pierced the vital cavity, and the wretch shivered in terror in his enemy's hug. With his knife, which he held in his left hand, Coignard was seeking for his heart.

"Mercy, grant me mercy," moaned Darius. "Give me up to the authorities, if you like, but do not kill me."

The grenadier stopped when on the point of striking. An idea had flashed upon his brain. Without letting go his hold or removing the blade from his breast, he said:

"Let you off! nonsense; you would have a good laugh at me. Say your prayers, if you know any. You have time, for I am in no hurry to end my fun with you."

"Mercy!" repeated the cowardly rogue. "I am rich, and will give you gold—much gold."

"You don't mean to say you are as rich as all that," sneered

the victor. "Well, we'll talk this over presently. In the meantime, I must pack you up to suit my ideas."

Keeping one knee on Darius's chest, and holding his knife handy between his teeth, the grenadier took a plumbing line out of his pocket, and after securing the unresisting captive's wrists fastened his arms to his sides, and finally tied his legs together. Thus trussed, it was quite impossible for the man to make a movement. He could only groan and roll his distended eyes in terror.

Their promptly terminated combat had taken place on a platform only a few feet broad, which ended the roof in that direction. Beyond was a sharp slope which ran down till lost to sight in the void. The chimney-stack completely walled off this isolated shelf, seemingly built on purpose to enable a crime to be committed or a guilty person to be privately executed.

When the grenadier had finished pinioning Darius, he spurned him with his foot against the wall, and without delaying to inquire as to his condition, pulled off his coat to see how far his shoulder was or was not injured. It bled freely, but it was only a flesh wound. Coignard bound it up with his handkerchief, donned his coat once more, re-lit his lantern, and explored the place to make sure that he was by himself. On coming back round the chimney-stack, he kicked a bundle of papers on the spot where he had struggled with Darius. Such a find was singular there, and so he opened it and glanced over the contents.

An interesting piece of reading evidently, for deep gratification was pictured upon his countenance, and he carefully pocketed the papers. After terminating his inspection without coming upon anything suspicious, he put out his light and came to sit down by the side of the quaking captive.

"You wanted to have a chat, citizen soldier," railed the grenadier. "I ask no better treat myself. Talk away."

Darius groaned lamentably,

"In the first place," resumed Coignard, "be good enough to tell me where you skulked so as to drop on me."

Instead of verbal answer, the good patriot raised his eyes towards the chimney-stack.

"I see," said Coignard, "you climbed by those iron steps, and whilst I was looking on my level, like the noodle I was, you waited for me to come along underneath you perched up there?"

Darius hung his head in assent.

"Well done, old boy. For a warrior who has only marched to the place of execution, you can place a fine ambushade."

As the man of stratagems showed no joy at the ironical eulogy, Coignard continued:

"Now, why were you spying upon me, and where is the rest of your gang?"

"I was not watching you, and I was all alone," gasped Darius, still choking.

"You don't say so," returned the grenadier; "you scamper on the leads like this, all by yourself? A funny caper, confess."

"'Tis the truth."

"We shall find that out. In any case I forewarn you that I have

my plan arranged. Your squad probably awaits me on the stairs, or may come up to help you on finding we do not come down. I am sorry for you, but before one of your rascals lays a hand on my collar, I shall toss you over to ascertain if the corporation paving stones are tender or not. It is a clear hundred and fifty feet; and, if you would like to get down by another road, why I advise you to tell your fellows to let me pass. I shall go down with you, or else we both jump over together. Your head answers for mine, d'ye see?"

"As you put it, I have nothing to fear," said the trooper, suddenly regaining courage. "Come along with me, you have a knife, and my hands are tied. You could kill me if I tricked you."

"We can always try that means," answered Coignard, "if I bring myself to spare you the breakneck leap, but I want to know first what you are up to here?"

"Hiding," replied Darius, not with hesitation.

"You in hiding! you, a soldier of the city guard. From whom were you hiding?"

"From the aristocrats."

"From the—ha, ha, ha! it is more likely you would frighten them. Go to; yours is not a good tale. Think of another."

During the pause which ensued the city guardsman snarled with rage, and then said:

"Don't you know what happened here yesterday?"

"Oh, yes, I've an inkling of it. The Mountain was swept away, and it appears your chief had a hot time of it."

"The other night I came to defend the city authorities with the Marceau Faubourg men, and Henriot set me on guard at the door of the Salle Saint-Jean. At two in the morning, the sections came up and drove us all into a heap. They threw Henriot out of window and took away the others. I had no eagerness to have my head cut off in their company, and so, in the scuffle, I hid under the committee table."

"Where you bravely remained——"

"The whole day," rejoined the trooper piteously, "waiting till it was dark to come forth."

"So you were in the Salle Saint-Jean when I came in there?"

"Just so; I thought it a search party and I ran up here."

"Oh, it was you who preceded me up the stairs?"

"Yes. Oh, if I had only known it was one man!"

"Tut! if you had known that, you would have taken to your heels all the same, for you are a coward, citizen Darius. That is the very reason of my crediting your story, for it is just like you to creep under a table instead of fighting for your captain."

"Ah!" sighed Darius in relief; "well, you see, I am alone, and you can let me go."

"Stop a bit, my valiant trooper; we have other business to settle."

"What other?" whined the craven. "I am a good patriot, and I never did you any wrong."

"Indeed! how about your shoving me off the roof a little while ago? It was not your fault if I did not smash my head on the flags."

"I did not do it on purpose; I was trying to get away, and I ran against you——"

"That might be so. But how about your dropping on me and running your knife into my shoulder, eh? Was that pure chance, too?"

"Well, you were hunting me, and, moreover, I did not recognise you."

"In short, citizen Darius," replied the grenadier tranquilly, "you see that I have every possible reason to kill you. I shall keep you as a hostage, to help me get out of this place. But you have been fool enough to prove that you are quite alone, and now nothing stays me from sending you down to join the carcase of your chief Henriot."

"Mercy, mercy!" screamed the prisoner again. "I have money, and I—I'll give you half; you shall be a rich man."

"True. The fact is I forgot you offered to share your savings with me. Was it out of your trooper's pay that you put by so much as to enrich your mates?"

"I have other revenues," said Darius hastily, shuddering to think Coignard did not believe his promises.

"What are they?"

"I was in trade in the old times, and I hid my gold when the Revolution broke out."

"Hid your gold, did you? whereabouts? In the Capuchin monastery?"

Notwithstanding his bonds, Darius started up, and could not repress an exclamation of fright and surprise.

"Ho, ho! I seem to have hit the right nail on the head!" observed the grenadier. "If the gold coin you promise me to ransom your hide is out of the mint you have set up there, in the Catacombs, it is useless to offer it."

"I can give you good pieces," said Darius quickly.

"That's better! Now, at what figure do you rate the life of a rogue of your degree?"

"I have one hundred real gold louis," said the captive with a regretful sigh; "if you will let me go from here you shall have them."

"A hundred! you are joking."

"I have no more," grumbled Darius.

"Then, prepare for the biggest jump you ever took in your life. At that price, I must prefer to treat myself to the riddance of such a rascally remnant of the Republic as you."

He moved as if to rise.

"No, no, do not kill me," roared the other desperately; "tell me how much you want."

"I want ten thousand livres, in gold or silver, as you please."

"Ten thousand! a fortune!"

"Exactly why I want it. But make haste. I have no time to lose, and I can only give you one minute to decide."

Darius writhed in his bonds, and his contorted features expressed the most cowardly fright. He was a hideous sight. Coignard rose and stepped towards him.

"Hold! I agree to everything," said the dastard. "You shall have your ten thousand livres, but unbind me and let me go."

"Not so quick, my boy, not so quick. When am I to be paid?"

"To-morrow, if you like."

"Where? in the Capuchin monastery?"

"Why not?"

"Because I distrust that part of the town."

"Well, I go every evening to the Bleeding Heart Tavern, in the Rue de la Calandre. I shall expect you there at ten o'clock."

"That's settled. At ten to-morrow in the Bleeding Heart."

Darius grinned with glee.

"By the way," added the grenadier, off-handedly, "you may as well know that if it comes into your head to break the appointment, or contrive any trick, you will repent it."

"Don't be alarmed; you have my promise," growled Darius.

"I have something besides," went on the other as negligently as before, "a paper you dropped—a man cannot prevent every mishap—it contains the plan of your mint in the Catacombs and the way to it from the Capuchin monastery—quite complete. Here are the passwords, too, to open the way, a list of your partners, and tested recipes how to imitate the coins of the tyrant. The Republic encourages industry, and so I am sure that, were I to carry this document to the public prosecutor, he would have you brought before him instantan that he might reward you."

The hapless trooper rolled his eyes with spite and terror.

"So it is settled; you will hand me the ten thousand livres to-morrow evening. Better bring gold—it's more handy."

There was no reply from Darius, who was choking with rage.

"Perhaps, though, you have changed your mind? Just as you please—I can alter mine; and I like to get these things quickly off my hands."

"No, no!" shrieked the bound man; "but when you receive the cash to-morrow you will return the papers?"

"That's fair, one for the other. But enough talk; as all is arranged, let us be going."

"You see I cannot walk."

"Don't fret. I'll attend to that."

He bent over Darius and undid the cord round his legs, so that the latter could rise with his aid.

"You are right now. Away!"

"But you're forgetting my arms are tied?"

"Not at all. You are not going to walk on your hands. When necessary I will help you."

Darius's eyes flashed with fury.

"Show the way, my wealthy comrade," said Coignard, pushing him towards the narrow ledge by which they had come.

Forced to obey, the entrapped patriot walked on, sustained by his victor, and the pair arrived at the top of the stairway without accident. There the grenadier continued to keep the other in front of him in going down, as the best way to watch him and to use him as a buckler in case of a sudden attack.

But the Hôtel de Ville remained deserted, not a soul being visible when they came out on the Place de Grève. They crossed the open space side by side, not speaking, whilst Darius ground his teeth.

"My old friend," said Coignard, when they were at the corner of the Quai Pelletier, "I have my own business to attend to, and I

daresay you have yours. I must leave you. I count upon meeting you to-morrow evening at ten, military time."

"But you are never going to leave me here tied up like a fowl for roasting? Come, Publicola, undo my arms."

"Citizen Darius," responded the grenadier gravely, "you have learnt that the feet alone suffice for walking. The arms come into play when you have to run, and I do not care to let you run at large to-night. You might wish to run after me, and that would do neither of us any good. You can go to the Capuchin monastery, and there get untied."

Whilst the captive indulged in a torrent of frightful oaths, the other rapidly made off along the river side.

"I have not wasted my night," he said. "I nearly broke my neck, and I received a stab; but I got the count's box. I can say a couple of words to the Spanish darling, and to-morrow evening, with the ten thousand livres of that hang-dog Darius, I will have enough to join her in Spain. Huzza!"

VIII.

THE LOVE-FLIGHT.

IN 1794 the Ile des Cygnes in no wise resembled what it is at present. The Grenelle bridge, which links it with the mainland, was not built then, and the trees which make it a shaded promenade, were not even saplings. But there was a thick undergrowth, so that the islet, much larger then, was as wild-looking as a Corsican thicket, and was utterly uninhabited. Only one thing revealed the hand of man, a wretched board hut to wit, which was erected on the western extremity to shelter the Auteuil ferryman. Since the Reign of Terror set in, this man had given up business; the shelter decayed, and only a few fishermen came up the river at times to get out of a shower.

On this night, though, a feeble ray of light filtered through the disjointed clapboards and illumined a man sitting in a boat under the rock supporting the dwelling. Watching the already whitening sky over Paris, he showed unequivocal signs of impatience. When three o'clock struck at the far-off Grenelle church he rose, leaped to land, walked up to the cabin, and knocked discreetly. The door opened, and the Count de Sainte-Hélène appeared on the threshold.

"Is it time to start?" he inquired.

"Rather; it will be daylight in an hour, my lord, and, to shoot by Saint-Cloud, where there is a post of *sans-culottes*, I want to take advantage of their being half asleep at least, to say nothing of the wind rising up, and a chance to use the sail."

"Without seeing Coignard again?" muttered the count slowly, with a regretful sigh.

"It won't do to linger," said the ferryman, "the man does not turn up."

"You are right, Bernard, I daresay. What is your opinion, Rosa?"

At this question a boy, who was puffing at a cigarette in the shelter, looked up quickly. It was the young Spanish lady. The better

to brave the risks of this voyage she had cast off her proper apparel in favour of a graceful masculine one. A dark green hunting jacket imprisoned her supple waist, around which she wore a belt that carried a dirk like midshipmen wear. Soft high boots allowed the lovely outline of her limbs to be traced, and her hair was coiled under a black, broad-brimmed felt hat.

A moment before she had been idly watching the smoke rings rising in the air, her eyes lighted up at the question.

"Pierre Coignard will come," she answered leisurely.

"What leads you to believe he is not deceiving us?"

"His voice and his looks. Liars have no such firm gaze, no such frank, clear speech."

"You hold him high in honour, Rosa. He served the Republic which outlaws me, and he may betray us without being to blame."

"He will come," retorted the girl emphatically.

As the noble loved Rosa with all his heart and soul, he did not care to argue; he may have felt she was right. But he also knew of what importance was every minute at that juncture. So he beat round the bush.

"Indeed this man may not be a traitor, but if he falls into some snare and fails, his arrest may ruin us. Day dawns, and remaining here is serious rashness. My good Bernard, get the boat ready."

"This man held your life in his hands, and is devoted to your projects. After that, you think he will turn out a betrayer! It strikes me, from the confidence he placed in you, that of the soldier and the nobleman the best judge of loyalty is not the Count de Sainte-Hélène."

These bitter words made Pontis fix his eyes on the speaker, and maybe engendered a suspicion. But this was not the time or place for argument.

"Rosa," he said, in a stern and almost saddened tone, "your dying father entrusted you to me. To him I swore to guard your life and honour. I should break that pledge if I let you remain exposed any longer to the dangers surrounding us here. Come, my darling, come, I entreat you, without losing precious time."

He took the first step towards the door. At that very moment three sharp quick whistles pierced the deep nocturnal silence.

"'Tis he!" exclaimed the count. "Forgive me, Rosa, I ought to follow your advice always. You women are inspired by heaven."

He kissed her hand, and sprang out to the river bank. Rosa drew herself up, but she became pale as the dead, and stood still by the lintel of the cabin door.

"Bernard," said Pontis, in the sharp tone of a military officer giving a command, "bring that man over in your boat in five minutes."

The ferryman had already put off, and was soon on the return, when a man could be seen standing at the prow.

"Is that you, Pierre?" challenged Pontis, anxiously.

"It is, my lord," came the grenadier's answer, in an undertone.

"I am a little late, as you see, but I bring the reliquary."

Sainte-Hélène could not repress an exclamation of joy as the messenger leaped on shore.

"You are wounded, sir!" exclaimed the Spanish girl.

The soldier gave her a deeply grateful look, whilst he replied carelessly:

"Nothing to speak of, lady ; a scratch when I was clambering over a roof. It will not show to-morrow. My lord, here is your reliquary," he continued unaffectedly to the nobleman.

The dim dawning light fell on the two men brought into contact by strange hazard, and showed widely different emotion on their faces. Count Pontis had turned pale on touching the jewel which reminded him of his father's death, and he bowed respectfully to the holy relic. The grenadier, spellbound in dumb contemplation of the woman, distractedly received the other's thanks.

"Pierre," said the latter, "what you have done for me is above all payment. From this day forward, consider me as your friend, ay, your brother. Tell me frankly what I can do for you."

"Nothing for the time, my lord. You gave me yesterday more money than will keep me two years. You are going to Spain, now, and we shall not meet again. Hence, say farewell, and go quickly."

"Money cannot pay such services as yours, Hearken to me. I cannot take you with me, for you have no passport, and your uniform would get you arrested as a deserter. But I shall be in Catalonia in a month, where you may join me. You can enlist in my troop, and I promise you shall soon be an officer. An epaulette in Spain is better than sentry-duty at the door of the Convention."

"I am obliged to your lordship. By-and-by this may come to pass, but it cannot be at present. I do not like to fight against my country."

"You can go to America."

"Is that your destination?"

"No ; but I can send you there as a sergeant to commence with."

"My lord," replied Coignard, after a brief pause, "I do not care much to serve Spain ; but I shall not let a few obstacles stand between us. Tell me where I can find you in that country."

"At the Marcen mansion, in the Calle Mayor, at Tarragona. If I be out of town, Rosa will receive you and let you know where I am to be found."

At the mention of Rosa his listener had hard work to conceal his emotion, and his voice was unsteady as he made reply :

"I shall bear that in mind, my lord."

There came a most embarrassing silence, which Pontis broke.

"Rosa," he said to the girl, who looked on mute and quivering, "why do you not thank this honest soldier who has once again exposed his life for us. Embrace him as you would my brother."

At this speech Coignard shivered from head to foot, and the Spaniard turned deadly pale. They would be obliged to coldly exchange the kiss which the count's coming had cut short in the house in the Rue Saint-Maur, and of which both treasured the burning memory—before the very man whose existence was the ban upon their happiness. But their eyes spoke and blended that remembrance, part tenderness and part bitterness. They understood one another. The lady stepped forward and held up her forehead for the soldier to touch it with his fluttering lips. Rosa felt a spasm of indescribable delight, and closed her eyes the better to enjoy so much bliss. Happily the day was long breaking, and the count could not perceive the agitation of the two.

"Not a moment to lose now," he cried to Rosa. "My darling, get

ready. I will arrange with Bernard so that we shall be off in five minutes." He left the young couple alone. Silent, motionless, embarrassed, they burned to finish the avowal so abruptly interrupted the night before, yet, spite of passing time and Pontis's haste to load the boat with travelling necessities, they kept on eyeing one another without venturing to break the charm by a silly word. Besides, what was the use in an avowal, when their eyes had made that, and spoken even more? Both felt that on this instant depended their lives. And still they shrank from uttering the compact that would bind them together till death—in crime perchance. It was Pierre who first found the strength to speak.

"Rosa," he said in a deep voice, "I must tell you that I love you."

"Hush, you unfortunate man, be silent!"

"I love you."

"Pierre, in an hour I shall be far away. For pity's sake, do not say what will cause me many a tear."

Her colour had come gradually back, her bosom rose and fell with the hurried throbbing of her heart, and all her frame quivered with pleasure.

"Well, Rosa, tell me one word, if only one," continued Coignard, "and I will quit everything and go to Spain, to the world's end for that matter, so long as I find you there and—loving me."

No pen can tell on paper what passion and frankness there was in his voice.

"Do I love you?" she said, with a flaming gaze.

"Life and fame—all, all are yours, my beloved! I will be your slave. Command anything, and I will obey you."

"You have already risked life for me."

The soldier snapped his fingers. The Spaniard covered him with her consuming look.

"You say you will obey my command?"

"I swear to do it!"

"Then, hear me, Pierre. Before seeing you, I imagined I loved. Now you and I have no one between us. The past has fled on its way like a meaningless dream. Pierre, I love you too."

He reeled.

"I do love you; yes, and without you it will not be life to me. I go, yet I am yours. Be it a month, a year, ten years, still will I wait for you, and when you say 'I am here,' I swear to you I will be your wife."

Wild with joyous desire, he leaped towards her, but she waved him back, and said in a voice no longer tremulous:

"I have sworn, and shall keep my vow. Forget not that you have pledged yourself likewise."

He nodded emphatically.

"We are united for evermore!" said Rosa slowly.

He would have made some reply, when the count's voice rose to remind him the hour was come to leave the loving woman whom he adored with all the frenzy of the most violent passion. A transport of rage and ferocious jealousy prompted his brain to commit a murder, and his fingers clenched the butt of the pistol in his belt. But Rosa's dainty hand was laid on his arm, and her sweet lips murmured in his ear:

"You vowed to obey me. I do not wish his death."

"All is ready," said Pontis. "Bernard is chafing to be off, and we must first land our friend on the other side. Make haste, Rosa, I beg you."

It was high time, indeed, for the sun was rising, and the least delay might be fatal. The Spaniard furtively pressed Coignard's hand and stepped into the boat with him.

"Cross over, Bernard," said the nobleman. "Now, my good Pierre, a word before we separate. I really trust we shall meet again, and I shall expect you to come to Tarragona if you enter Spain. But if I should need your acting for me in France, how can a letter reach you?"

The grenadier reflected for a moment before he answered, with a glance at Rosa:

"Faith, my lord, a soldier shifts his quarters very frequently, and I can hardly say mine are permanent; but I have a brother who has settled down and is not likely to move. If you need me, address me to his care, Alexandre Coignard, gardener, at Montreuil, near Paris. He will manage to forward the letter to me."

"That is clear, my brave friend. So long as the Count of Sainte-Hélène exists, you may depend upon him. Now, grenadier Coignard, let's shake hands," offering his to the soldier, agitated by emotion.

"Heaven watch over you and grant us to see you again," said Rosa as the boat touched the shore.

Pierre kissed her hand, and leaped on the bank. The east wind blew strong, and rapidly swept the boat towards Saint-Cloud. Sitting on the strand, the grenadier gazed after the nobleman and the girl, who waved him their adieux. For more than an hour he was wrapped in reverie, and the white sail had long disappeared behind the tall poplars before he thought of departure.

"Yes, I shall see her again," he said to himself, as he leisurely walked back to town; "and before long, too, since I shall have Darius's ten thousand livres this evening. Only to think," he added, clenching his fists, "that, if I had flung Pontis into the Seine and stuck to those papers, I might now set up myself as the Count of Sainte-Hélène!"

He was entering the Paris road when he heard a voice shout out:

"The grenadier, Cassius Publicola, is a traitor!"

He turned sharply round, but he could see no one.

IX.

ENRICHED AND IMPOVERISHED.

THE Rue de la Calandrc, not to be found in present-day Paris, was a most curious specimen of the old Parisian streets in the Reign of Terror. Dark, narrow, and filthy, it serpentine in the heart of the Cité, and had a sinister mien, particularly by night. Bordered by dilapidated stalls and tumble-down dwellings, it boasted naught of the animation of the populous thoroughfares of the Temple or Saint-Martin wards.

By a glimpse at the dull fronts of the still houses, anybody understood that honest trade was banished from the squalid lane.

Travellers were scarce, even in broad daylight; and when Pierre Coignard turned out of the Rue de la Barillerie at ten at night into this cut-throats' haunt, he found himself alone. The only light that twinkled in the shadows escaped from the uncleaned panes of a shop twenty steps ahead.

But the soldier had ventured more than once into this ill-famed quarter, and he made unhesitatingly for this pale beacon. For his expedition he had left off his uniform, and wore an ample topcoat, loose, wadded, long skirted, with a high collar, well adapted for carrying weapons unseen. He had a cane, which tolerably well replaced the sword which the count had damaged so badly in the Catacombs. Under the plain dress, however, he preserved his proud and soldierly bearing.

"Notre-Dame is striking the half-hour," muttered he, improving his pace. "I am behind-hand, and Darius is quite capable of making that an excuse for not waiting for me. However, there's safe to be a throng in the Bleeding Heart, for mother Giffard would never have illuminated for the mere fun of it."

He stopped under a sign which squeaked as it swung on rusty hinges, and there he listened. A confused hubbub rose out of a cellar, with its flapdoor just under the front wall at the street edge, a clatter of glasses and dishes, a discordant blending of drunkards' songs and quarrelsome voices, all the more audible without from the street being so quiet.

"It seems a pretty full party," commented Coignard. "My rascally trooper ought to be there. Let's go in and see."

He went down two steps, pushed a worm-eaten door, and walked into a roomy hall, at the far end of which a repulsive-looking hag was installed behind a counter. Around two long greasy tables upwards of thirty men, in smocks and red caps of liberty, were drinking and smoking. The opaque cloud from this offensive collection formed a canopy over their heads, like the smoke-cloud over a volcano. Most of them were inebriated, some shouted the "*Ça ira*," or more obscene songs, and then debated on the day's doings, and threatened one another with voice and fist; many lapped up their wine by bowing their heads down on the table. Coignard's entrance was scarcely noticed, though his costume called for remark. At first he had some trouble to distinguish any faces in the cloud, but, after some seconds, made sure that Darius was not present.

"Good even, mother Giffard," he said, going up to the landlady behind her bulwark.

"You are a bad citizen not to say 'citizeness,'" grumbled the virago, eyeing him irritably.

"Well, then, citizeness, do you not know your friends?" returned Coignard, lifting the wide-brim felt which had partly concealed his face.

"Soho! this is you, handsome soldier of my heart! Have you deserted that you are tricked out as a dandy?"

"Pooh! is not this a free country, and mayn't a free citizen dress just as he pleases to go see his lady-love?"

"Are you looking for her here? Let me tell you, we do not allow any such creatures at the Bleeding Heart."

"Come, come, old dame, don't get hot. I am only looking after my friend Darius, who made an appointment here at ten with me, but I do not see him."

"Darius the horse soldier?"

"That's the man."

"Like yourself, he has shed the uniform and come out a butterfly. This don't seem the season for soldiers' coats."

"Oh, indeed, he's quitted the regulation suit, too, has he? Well, where is my comrade?"

"Half-wheel to the left, you confounded grenadier, and open the door yonder behind the cask. There you will find Darius in the back parlour in good society."

"Got company, eh! it makes no odds to me. I shall see you again, citizeness, so I do not say good-bye. Send me in a bottle of something stiff to drink."

Following the directions of citizeness Giffard, the adventurer threaded a mass of empty casks and unwashed kitchen utensils, and opened the door of the den known as the back parlour. It was a smoke-blackened room, lighted from the rear of the house. Four men were whispering together around a table groaning under empty bottles and an iron lamp. Darius sat in the middle, as if presiding over this symposium. As mother Giffard had forewarned his visitor, he had replaced his military apparel with plainer things, quite new. He had shaved off his moustaches, and his flat face, edged by long red whiskers, contrasted queerly with his habiliments. The three others showed unprepossessing faces, also good enough suits. They seemed soldiers in mufti.

Pierre Coignard's entrance cut the conversation short, and he had no difficulty in guessing that it had been about himself. But he had not needed this discovery to be on his guard, and he had prudently comprised in the eventualities that of finding Darius in kindred company.

He stepped freely up to the board, pulled a stool towards it, sat at an empty place near Darius, took a glass, and poured himself out a brimmer. The trooper watched him with an amazement enhanced by disquietude, and his three acolytes exchanged questioning glances in silence.

"I am late," remarked Coignard, in a perfectly untroubled voice; "but I was sure you would wait for me. A man of your stamp keeps his word, anybody knows, eh, my old mate?"

Darius growled what he took to be an affirmative.

"Besides, our bit of business is plain as a pikestaff, and not so long to settle. It's not like a contract to be debated before a lawyer, though you have taken the precaution to bring plenty of witnesses," continued the grenadier, watching the trio from out of the corner of his eye.

"Why not?" retorted Darius, through gnashing teeth. "These citizens are good, solid friends, and such are never in the way."

"Oh, as long as the citizens know about the business I offer no objections to their being present. Talking of friends to see fair-play, I have brought a brace of my own," went on Coignard, opening

his flowing overcoat, and displaying a pair of pistols. "We can, therefore, talk away as much as you please."

Darius and his companions looked at one another glumly, not seeming eager to begin the conversation.

"If I remember aright," proceeded the grenadier with imperturbable coolness, "we agreed last night that you should hand me over ten thousand livres in exchange for a wallet."

"Where is the wallet?"

"In my pocket here," was Coignard's reply as he tapped his waistcoat.

"Good! Pass it over, and as soon as I am sure the papers are all there, I will give you the bag of money."

"Comrade, I was going to propose just the contrary," returned the grenadier, without a quiver; "you will pass me over the gold and silver, and when I have found the amount correct I will give you the wallet."

"No, by a thousand devils, no!" cried Darius furiously, "I shall not part with my money without handling the papers."

"Just as you please, citizen trooper; then it's no go. The wallet will not cumber me much till to-morrow, when I know where to leave it to do most good."

"You'll excuse me, citizen," intervened one of the party in a soothing tone; "but why do you expect our friend to have confidence in you when you distrust him?"

"You are four, and I stand alone," responded Coignard firmly; "it is quite fair I should take more precautions than you."

The four consulted each other with a glance, and the one who had spoken, with a strong Italian accent by-the-bye, whispered something to Darius. During this conference, Coignard whistled a cavalry call and drummed carelessly on the butt of a pistol.

"Well, as you say, let's settle the matter," said the trooper abruptly.

He threw a bag of money before Coignard, who took it up without hurry, and set to work methodically counting the louis and the six-livre silver pieces.

"The amount is quite correct, so there are your papers," said the grenadier handing the pocket-book to Darius, who pounced on it greedily and began examining the contents.

"They are all here," he sighed in relief.

At this cue the trio sprang up all at once. Coignard's right-hand neighbour rushed to the door, and closed it noiselessly. He on the left placed himself so that the visitor could not reach the window, and the last one pulled out a rope and took a forward step.

"At last it's our turn!" roared Darius.

The victim had not budged. He tranquilly reviewed the threatening arrangements, still playing absently with the piles of coin. This unexpected calm made the rogues falter, lest there was a plot in preparation.

"Well, my old friend Darius," said the grenadier, with admirably assumed indifference, "the business has been nicely settled. It shows what a good thing mutual confidence is! I wonder now that I made such a bother, and before I came arranged so that I had nothing to fear."

Darius listened with visible anxiety.

"Yes," pursued Coignard unconcernedly, "you will pardon me, for it's hard to tell who will live and who will die, and an accident is so quick a-coming, particularly in the night time in a quarter like this. So I arranged my safeguard."

"Your safeguard?" repeated the trooper panting with uneasiness.

"Good heavens, yes! but simple enough, as you shall judge. I, too, have a friend, good and solid, as you say. I had a chat with him before coming here, and it is settled that, if I am not safe back at home to-morrow morning, he will go and ask after me of the public prosecutor, and tell him all about our little doings."

"Our doings?" repeated Darius turning pale once more.

"Yes; I let him have copies of all the papers, but never you fear! he's a delicate fellow, and he will not speak if I return safe and sound."

The unfortunate trooper let an exclamation of ill-suppressed rage escape him, whilst the three others looked checkmated.

"I guessed correctly," thought our adventurer, "the knaves meant to strangle me like a rat in a trap, and it was a good idea of mine to go to Montreuil and let brother Alexandre know what was in the wind. Hence," resumed the grenadier aloud, "I am quite easy. Now that we have got through our accounts, I hope we shall part good friends. Sit down again, citizens, therefore, for you will only weary yourselves if you keep on your feet instead of drinking with me. Come, Darius, to your health, and no ill will." He filled up his glass afresh and tossed it off, whilst the stupefied bullies dropped into their former places around the board.

"And how is business, my old comrade?" added he, with perfect good humour. "I suppose the citizens who have been witnesses to our transaction are partners of yours?"

The trooper did not reply immediately to the query. One of his friends approached him, and conferred with him in an undertone without the questioner showing any impatience.

"Yes, yes; my partners," replied Darius.

"Citizen," said the soft-spoken reveller, "our friend Darius has been kind enough indeed as to let us share in his trade, and we should be happy to reckon you in with us."

"I am greatly flattered, certainly, citizen; but I intend leaving town before long."

"We really regret that," went on the gentlemanly ruffian, "for I can assure you that you would meet only members of the best society amongst us. This gentleman, for example," he said, indicating the sturdy fellow beside Darius, "is a respectable dealer whose metallurgical knowledge is very useful to us. My friend Saffieri here is a Piedmontese like myself, and wholly at your service. My own name is Carretti, and I shall be delighted to help you in any way. To tell you the truth, we lead a merry life, and make considerable money."

"Is it indelicate to inquire by what craft you get such handsome profits?" asked Coignard, amused at this flow of words.

"Not at all, dear sir," responded the Italian; "it will be a pleasure to initiate you into our little secret. In the first place, we have a factory in the Catacombs of which you have some idea; it works beautifully. We also operate in the city."

"Do you, indeed! What kind of operations are yours?"

Carretti hesitated, but, in spite of Darius's infuriated glance, responded:

"Citizen Publicola, having gone so far, I do not see why I should keep back that we specially attend to government contractors."

"To contractors?"

"Just so. As you are in the army, you must have noticed how the poor soldiers are robbed by the purveyors. They amass scandalous fortunes, and though paper money and famine rule, they give luxurious dinner parties and store away gold. Now, we take it upon ourselves to repair the injustice of fate and restore the balance."

"Quite clear," said the novice, with the utmost coolness; "in plain language, you shear the shearers—you burglariously rob the swindlers."

"Nay, rarely that; but at the same time, if it comes to that pinch, our friend Lexcellent, the dealer in metals, has no peer for bursting in a door or picking a lock. If you care to see him at work, I am sure it will interest you, as you are one of the trade yourself."

"How's that so?" queried Coignard in surprise.

"Our friend Darius told me you were a locksmith before you became a soldier."

"I do not deny that," rejoined the grenadier, marvelling what the man was driving at; "but I do not turn my craft to what citizen Lexcellent does."

"Excuse me, citizen Publicola, but our friend Darius again stated that he met you last night on the roof of the Hôtel de Ville with a ring full of keys."

"Draw your inference," faltered Coignard, unable to prevent colouring up.

"I infer that in your leisure moments you do not disdain to make use of your skill. In the roof of the town hall I believe there is a store-room for the valuables of the executed prisoners."

The hearer bit his lips, and did not see fit to remonstrate. He perceived that the Italian was a much more dangerous antagonist than the dull trooper Darius, and feared that his scamper over the house-tops might do him an ill turn. This late-coming reflection disposed him to be less high-handed with Darius and his band. Besides, there was the inward satisfaction of having beaten them on their own ground, in this risky standing at bay, and that tended to make him easy towards them. On his part, the cunning Piedmontese congratulated himself on his mode of proceeding, and winked secretly to his congeners.

Saffieri and Lexcellent agreed that Coignard must be gagged if he could not be killed; and the plan began to penetrate Darius's thicker head. The momentary silence was a truce. Coignard broke it with a concession, in order to endure repose until he could get away to Spain.

"In sooth," he said, lightly, "I have no deep-rooted dislike to the work you mention, and I own that my craft might come handy in your war upon the contractors; but at present I am not disposed to amuse myself that way. We will see about it later on."

"Very natural, and in your place I should act like you. Business can go to Old Nick as long as there's money in the pouch. Another glass of brandy! Darius, my friend, you know it is time we were off."

The trooper rose mechanically, without removing his eyes from the

gold left by Coignard in front of him. The precious metal attracted him, and he groaned in despair when the soldier finally engulfed the sum in his pocket. Carretti had filled the round of glasses, and his two other mates hastened to hob-nob with the new comer, who had recovered all his serenity.

"Sorry to have to leave you so soon, citizen Publicola," said the orator of the band, "but we have an appointment."

"I wouldn't detain you, citizens, but it is a long way to the Capuchin monastery," replied the grenadier, laughing.

"Oh, we are not going as far, and we intend spending the night more merrily. Only a call——"

"On a government contractor?"

"On a charming lady, a friend of Darius, who invited us to a party she gives to night."

"It can't be! Darius is not the man to know ladies who give parties."

"Why not?" growled the trooper, vexed.

"Coming to think of it, though," went on Carretti, as if reflecting, "if you do not mind accompanying us, citizen Publicola, I should be delighted to introduce you, and you can see for yourself how jollily we pass the time."

Surprised by this unexpected proposition the recipient wavered.

"What kind of a devil can a lady friend of Darius's be?" he mused.

The invitation did not tempt him in the least, and reason told him it was time to part from his dangerous companions. Yet he was impelled by vague curiosity. Moreover, like all who have gone through violent emotions, he felt an irresistible need to act and agitate. This is one of the ordinary effects of restlessness, and the grenadier wished to kill the time between the present and his departure for Spain. The two Italians exchanged uneasy looks with "the metal dealer," wondering if the soldier would come.

"To tell the truth, gentlemen," said the latter at last, after swallowing a full bumper, "I am curious to see the flame of our friend Darius, and I accept the offer."

Carretti glanced triumphantly for his cunning at his associates.

"Does your hostess live far?" queried the grenadier, warily.

"Only a couple of paces, in the Rue Guénégaud."

"Let's be off, then. You know that I must be home early to-morrow, my friend being a precise man, quite capable, if he does not see me, of going to the public prosecutor."

Hatred gleamed from Darius's eye, but the Italian spokesman hastened to say that the revels terminated long before daybreak. The whole five left the back room, and the Italian would let nobody else pay mother Giffard for the drink; she was nodding behind her bar, for it was close upon midnight, and the big room was well nigh deserted. They went along the river side towards the Pont Neuf, whilst the grenadier, who had imbibed in the Bleeding Heart brandy plenty of daring and recklessness, chatted with Carretti most animatedly.

"What did you say was the name of Darius's lady-love?" he questioned, at the corner of the Rue Dauphine.

"The Baroness of Ravenstein."

"A baroness! that's not bad for a patriot's flame!"

"Oh, she's a Fleming, a fellow-countrywoman of his; and though she is a lady of title, she's a sound patriot, and plaguey pretty, as you will soon see, for here we are!"

Darius, leading the party, had stopped before an old mansion, where he let the knocker fall three times heavily on the door, which opened to admit them across a lonely courtyard, and up a broad staircase. Darius rapped peculiarly at a door on the first storey. This time a woman showed the visitors into an immense room, furnished with rather threadbare luxury, and illuminated by a chandelier. Numerous persons, whose backs alone were visible, clustered round a sofa, and completely concealed the mistress of the house thus receiving the compliments of her callers. But Carretti took his new acquaintance by the hand, and cut through the throng to present him.

Coignard was preparing his best salute, and was already bowing, when a cry of surprise escaped him. A fainter one responded, and the stupor-stricken hostess dropped rather than reseated herself on the sofa.

"Lucette!" the grenadier could not help saying.

More self-controlled, the Baroness of Ravenstein retained the name of "Pierre" on her lips, but she uselessly sought to hide her blushes and confusion.

The Italian had witnessed this incident with astonishment mingled with gratification, for he perceived a new hold upon the grenadier in his prior acquaintance with the baroness.

Darius, lingering behind, had not heard the soldier's outcry. The latter speedily recovered his self-possession, and, bowing to the lady with perfect ease, paid her some well-chosen compliments. The supple and intelligent character of the son of Touraine lent itself wondrously to playing any part.

"This is why I never came across her," he muttered; "she made herself a baroness, and this vile Darius has been her consort. If I had not the Spanish beauty on my heart, what a glorious chance this would be for me to be even with the pair of them."

He closely examined his first love. The sweet little peasant lass had acquired exuberant shape and an almost impressive bearing. Her features had become more marked, but remained as regular, and if her complexion had lost its freshness, it had gained that bloodless whiteness due to idle life in cities. As for her dress, Lucette wore it with the ease innate in some women.

In short, the baroness was an incontestable beauty, and an observer would have been apt to pronounce her Parisian born and bred, for such blooms usually spring up there. Having recovered her self-control, she continued to receive the congratulations of her guests with a somewhat haughty grace, all the while keeping her eye upon her former lover, whom the strangest chance had brought across her path once again. Under her apparent indifference deep emotion was masked, and many a contrary feeling clashed in her bosom. With remembrances of the past mingled actual interests, which made the meeting an important event to Lucette. She wondered what Pierre had become since their separation, and what had brought him here under the wing of this villain to whom her life was bound. But any inquiry were imprudence just then, and the baroness was too cunning and too experienced to com-

promise herself. She resolved to observe and act according to circumstances. Her position as mistress of the house availed her in this step, and she continued to deal out courtesy with well-assumed calmness.

The entire assemblage into which the Italian introduced Pierre Coignard was a singular one, and accident seemed that night to have collected the most opposite elements. Without fusing, the fragments of all the shattered classes of that revolutionised epoch were mixed together. It was easy to see, in fact, that Darius and his set formed the nucleus of the heterogeneous mass, but there were quite another kind of guests present. First there were the dense fellows with extravagant, shallow manners, whom Coignard recognised as new-made financiers, whilst their stylish neighbours betrayed to a dullard their former high rank.

"Those must be the army contractors the Piedmontese mentioned," muttered the grenadier; "but where the plague did these real ex-noblemen come from, and what are they all after here?"

More and more puzzled, he mingled with the groups and picked up a bit here and there of the conversation, whilst gradually nearing the baroness, who was occupied in chatting with two men of very different manners.

"Let me tell your ladyship," squeaked a little old gentleman, arrayed with overdone fastidiousness, "that I am always the most humble of your adorers, and by my faith! I do not wish citizen Tallien to restore me my estates, except that I may lay at your feet something more substantial than my verbal homage."

"Whilst waiting for that to come to pass, my lord marquis," responded the baroness, "I will be content if you will win me some money at *reversi*."*

"I am very sorry, my dear, but I have not fed the armies of the Republic like citizen Arcandier," replied the cautious marquis, pointing to a stout man with a fat face, beaming with the stupid vanity of one suddenly enriched.

"I should think you were sorry! It's my pride to be a supplier of the means of victory to the forces, and I wish to hold the same post as regards the baroness," said the ridiculous personage.

"My dear Arcandier," interrupted the lady, "you ought to lend the marquis your money to teach you fine manners. You both would be the gainers. But you are all pretty talkative to-night, gentlemen, and I would rather hear the cards flutter. May I ask the Chevalier de Kadersac to take a faro-table?"

"At your command, lady," replied a young fashionable, who had been talking in an undertone with the Piedmontese pair, who were studying Coignard surreptitiously. "I hope you will sit by me and smile on my play."

"Not at all, my dear chevalier; I prefer to give luck to the guest who comes here for the first time this evening. I shall sit beside him," she said, turning to the grenadier. "Of course you play faro?" she added in a bewitching voice.

Completely edified by this dialogue, he would certainly have refused

* "*Reversi*," or "*Reversis*," an obsolete four-handed game of cards, with a full pack, less the ten discarded.

the lure, but Lucette, in passing before him, had contrived to whisper: "Give me a word, Pierre!" and, bowing, he followed the stream which soon surrounded a large table at the end of the room. Like all ambitious men Coignard was a gambler, but he had never had enough money to tempt fortune, and it was not without a fast-beating heart that he beheld the Chevalier de Kadersac spread a very large sum of money before him. Dazzled by the flash, and charmed by the chink, the soldier felt the greed for gold seize on his brain, and in a single second he forgot all the events of the past two days. He fretted for the game to begin, and his eyes so clearly expressed the passion of gambling that Lucette, who sat beside him, did not even attempt to address him. Besides, Darius watched her suspiciously, and she deemed it prudent to await till fortune removed all prohibition from her former lover.

In the silence which always precedes great battles on the green cloth, the players seated around it prepared for the attack. The patriot trooper and his three friends did not seem eager to risk much, and the marquis had turned out a very scantily-filled purse, a token that he really needed restitution of his property. Half-a-dozen gamblers, unknown to Coignard, exhibited piles of six-livre pieces, whilst the army contractor displayed a heap of gold which must have cost the army on the Rhine many privations. As he shuffled, the Chevalier de Kadersac scanned the piles with the eye of a general counting the hostile forces.

"Baroness," he said, with a touch of raillery, "your neighbour does not think you'll bring him much luck, for he does not show any eagerness to punt against me."

Coignard blushed, quickly put his hand in his pocket and threw a handful of louis before him. Arcandier eyed the new-comer with some consideration, and the marquis muttered:

"Another enriched contractor! Undoubtedly, it's becoming bad form here."

The chevalier politely bowed to the high player and began dealing with a methodical calmness denoting long practice. His gentle, regular features were somewhat spoiled by a smile of evil omen and a squint, but he proved himself a first-class gambler in being emotionless, though luck was not favourable to him, and the bank became very low before the cards had more than half run out. The millionaire hit on the winning cards every time, and Coignard had thrice succeeded in heavy bets. The gold pieces so multiplied before him that the others eyed him enviously.

"Eternally lucky this evening," said Carretti suddenly, after a win of fifty louis from the bank. "I do so pity Kadersac."

The latter merely smiled and continued impassibly to deal. But, by a singular hazard, this compliment was the signal for a change in the luck. Anybody would have said that the Italian cast the evil eye, for thenceforward, Coignard's losses followed one another with incredible persistency. Seized by the formidable demon of gambling, the grenadier lost his self-command. His eyes flamed; one hand clutched the piles of coin, whilst the other lacerated his bosom. He no more saw and heard than he thought; all he did was to play on furiously and desperately. The end of the deal completed his ruin; the imperturbable Kadersac's rake drew away the very last piece he had, so that the unfortunate Pierre rummaged his pockets fruitlessly. All had been lost.

Of the Count de Sainte-Hélène's hundred louis and the ten thousand livres extorted from Darius, not one silver piece remained. The chevalier's hand of cards ran out at the same time as Coignard's money, and Kadersac tranquilly announced that he gave up the bank. No one offered to replace him. Darius was beaming with triumph.

"Gentlemen, supper awaits," said the baroness, rising.

The gamblers left the table growling, but Pierre Coignard kept his seat in the painful stupor that befalls cleaned-out players. He thought of nothing; he was the prey of defeat. Carretti's insinuating voice roused him.

"Good gracious, the dear fellow seems much put out," he said. "Have you lost much? I was not looking on, and I——"

Coignard sprang up, as if abruptly roused from sleep, stung by such impudence.

"You swindler," he said, in a voice quivering with wrath; "you know all about it, for you lured me into this hell to rob me."

"I assure you that we are all broken-hearted——"

"Enough! I see how things are, and I'll be even with you. I shall end my misery at once, but before I die I'll exterminate your crew."

"My dear sir," continued the Italian, without wincing, "if you will do us the honour of coming into our business, I can warrant you that this paltry loss will quickly be repaired."

Coignard darted a furious glance at him, but his fury cooled off immediately. He was in one of those exceptional situations when the mind obeys the most contrary impressions. The odious Carretti's perfidious sentence took root in the luckless grenadier's unsettled brain just as the enchanting image of Rosa flitted before him.

"I must see her again at any cost," he muttered, glancing wistfully about him.

The Piedmontese observed his convulsed features, and he grinned satirically, in the belief that here was the moment for the final stroke. "If you care to talk the idea over with me——"

"No, no, rascal, begone!"

"If you would like to talk it over, allow me to say, I shall be glad to see you at the baroness's—at Lucette's——"

"Lucette! do you too know her real name? you must be the devil himself. Well, then, yes, I'll meet you in her house to-morrow, and if you do not restore me my money, I'll show you what my sword can do!"

Whereupon he rushed out of the place like a madman.

X.

THE TEMPTRESS.

THE morning after Pierre Coignard's expensive game the reception room of the Baroness de Ravenstein had utterly changed in appearance. A smoky lamp lit up the remnants of a supper, sent in from the tavern, upon the table where so much gold had glittered. On a corner of the board some coarse plates, tavern glasses, and a bottle of brandy offered a strange blot on the rich furniture, the crystal of the candelabra and

the gilding on the chairs clashing with these materials of a low orgie. The revellers themselves were in discord with the hall of luxury, and the four participants in the repugnant repast were hard to recognise as the beaux. Darius and his compeers had changed their holiday attire for their own tawdry rags, and their hang-dog faces much better suited this native husk. They were so much more at ease that it was clear that they had cast off the ephemeral finery with pleasure. With crossed legs, their elbows on the table and pipes in their mouths, the quartette were conferring animatedly.

"I knew very well what I was about when I advised you to let me manage the job," said the Italian to Darius. "If it had not been for me, the ten thousand livres would still be in the grenadier's pocket, whilst it has come back to our treasury, thanks to friend Kadersac."

"Much gained thereby," growled the good patriot. "This accursed soldier knows all our secrets now, and nothing prevents him black-mailing us."

"I know how to put a stop on that," remarked the Italian quietly. "Oh, I don't believe in your methods. Always plotting and planning—a fine kind of work! Dead men alone tell no tales, and I shall not rest easy as long as Coignard lives."

"Tush! do you think we shall have nothing to fear if you kill him?"

"I shall not kill him myself, but let the guillotine do it. It takes no more trouble than to tell what I saw on the Ile des Cygnes. If he denounces us then, no one will believe him."

"That was a very good course three days ago, old man, when old Henriot commanded the city forces; but the aristocrats have the upper hand, and our trial will be soon over if we are caught."

"Yes, it would, before the new court," said the other Italian.

"To say nothing of Coignard being quite capable of selling us to get off himself."

"A thousand furies, then!" cried Darius; "how can we muzzle this dog?"

"I will do it if you let me have my own way."

"Very pretty," said Darius, washing his hands pantomimically of it; "act in your brilliant fashion, and get all our heads lopped off."

"Nobody's neck will suffer, and Coignard will be no fetter on us. You shall see. He gave a friend copies of the papers you were bungler enough to drop, did he not?"

"Just so. Well?"

"We must shut up that friend's mouth."

"That's right; but how?"

"Hear me out. Coignard bade him take them to the public prosecutor if he did not turn up."

"That's settled. Make haste!"

"But suppose we give this friend news of Coignard, and the order from him to hold his tongue?"

"I don't understand."

"It is clear enough, though. Suppose Coignard was locked up for something or other—burglary, for example. The next day one of us, Saffieri or I, it makes no difference, would go and tell the friend: 'I come from Pierre. He is arrested, and sends me to tell you not to bother with the message for the public prosecutor, because that would

only do him an injury.' The friend will not distrust one who knows the whole box of tricks ; he will be dumb as a fish, and the game will be ours."

"Not bad," applauded Saffieri ; "but Coignard may let the cat out if he be in the stone jug."

"Nonsense ! he's no such a fool. If we were to kill him, his precaution would avenge him after his death ; but he will say nothing whilst alive, being too fearful that inquiries will arise on his acquaintance with us ; and he will not care, I answer for it, to hear about his walk on the roof of the Hôtel de Ville."

"That's likely ; but if Coignard can't be stiffened, his friend may ; it will be safest," snarled Darius.

"You think of nothing but killing. What's the good ? The biggest burden of all is a dead man."

"Carretti's idea is not bad," said Lexcellent. "But will Coignard let himself be arrested ?"

"We can assist," replied the Italian with a sinister smile.

"Good ! but we must hunt up that friend," said his fellow-countryman.

"Now we are getting on. You have pointed out the hitch. Yes, we must find the friend, on which point Darius may furnish information."

"I !" protested the trooper.

"More likely you than another. You have known Coignard since—since——"

"A couple of years. We were in the same barracks in 1792, in the old Feuillants monastery."

"Had he acquaintances, friends from his part of the country, relatives ?"

"How am I to know ? All I remember is his brother dropping in now and then ; I had a couple of drinks out of him."

"Where did he live ?"

"He's a gardener out Charonne way or by Montreuil."

"There you are, then ! We need not seek further ; the nail is hit on the head. We have nothing more to do but get Coignard imprisoned, which I undertake to do."

"Yes, but he'll have to come under our thumb for that."

"So he will."

"Not so sure !"

"So sure, in fact, that it is he who is rapping at the door now."

A ringing double knock resounded on the street door.

"Saffieri, go down and let him in," said the Italian. "Are you going now to let me work as I think best ?"

"We agree," chorused the three.

"Then, all's clear. I shall do all the talk, and you will only say amen to everything. When I give you the wink, Darius, go and bring in the baroness."

"Hullo ! what's that for ?" said the trooper surlily.

"You will see. It is even probable that we shall have to leave her alone with our man. I may as well tell you that I have instructed her in her part, and she must play it, whether you scowl or not. Look out ; here he comes."

Pierre Coignard walked in straight up to the table. His pallid face and sunken eyes told enough of the night's fatigues and emotions. His habitual gay expression was displaced by a stern, sombre air. His hard look and close-set lips gave his features an imperious, almost ferocious, appearance. On seeing him approach, erect and haughty, the ruffians knew he was a man driven to an extreme resolution by despair.

"I was sure you would come, dear fellow," said the Italian spokesman, with his most winning smile.

"Were you? I did not know so myself half-an-hour ago," interrupted the visitor, taking a chair, roughly.

"In that case, we are all the more glad to see you again."

"Cease compliments," returned the grenadier curtly. "Speak to the point, so that we may finish sooner. Yesterday you robbed me."

"Fie! you misjudge us! rob a comrade, a partner! for we strongly hope you will join our party."

"You robbed me; I said so, and I repeat it. Now I must have money."

"We ask nothing better than to help you gain it."

"How?"

"Why, I told you yesterday, by interesting you in our business."

"In what way?"

"To begin with you can be very useful to us in our factory in the Catacombs."

"I am not a metal-monger," returned the ex-locksmith curtly.

"Why you are better than that, my dear boy. It is becoming hard for us to pass our work; gold coin is so rare that pieces are examined closely, and we need presentable fellows to get ours into circulation. Now, you have excellent manners, a handsome physique, and all the other parts to succeed in the upper classes. The upper classes are coming back with a rush and beginning to give parties. Will you agree to pass our gold with a heavy commission?"

"No," was the blunt reply.

"Why not, eh? you would have plenty of sport whilst earning your profit. I offer you the best position in our association."

"It's too slow," answered Coignard. "I want money, and lots of it at once."

"Then I see nothing for it but the operation I mentioned yesterday."

"The strong-boxes of the rich contractors, eh?" interrupted the other. "Delicious—one only runs the risk of the galleys. Anything else?"

"I can't say I see anything."

"I tell you that I must have cash, all the cash I lost last night."

"But, my dear friend," resumed the Piedmontese in a commiserating tone, "granting that you were cheated, it was not we who won your cash. The Chevalier de Kadersac is not in with us!"

"Enough! I mean to have my ten thousand livres by to-morrow, or I shall get what satisfaction I can by sending you all to the guillotine."

"I vow to you," said the Italian promptly, "that we have not the money, and the only means of procuring it is to go and take it from that grab-all Arcandier, the fat contractor you saw last night,

I have thought over the matter, which is very easy if you will lend a hand, and it is not a poor ten thousand livres you will have for your share. Arcandier keeps over six hundred thousand in his safe, so we shall all be rich."

"I do not speak against your robbing the contractor; but I do say I want to have nothing to do with it. Manage your own way to get me the money to-morrow; the rest does not concern me."

A silence ensued. The downdrawn features of the partners contrasted strongly with the speaker's determined air, and Darius could hardly contain his rage and fear when the Italian waved him out of the room on his special errand. Without losing calmness himself, the director of the band went on:

"Since you will not join us, Monsieur Coignard, you must see the necessity for our confabulating as to how to satisfy you; allow us to withdraw to the next room for half an hour."

"I will wait here for half an hour."

The men left the speaker to himself. Since his overnight's disaster, the unfortunate solder of fortune had undergone cruel anguish. To have the whole scaffolding of his project topple down, to lose at once his only resources and the means to rejoin his beloved, these were too much for his lacerated heart. He almost forgot his love in preparing to avenge himself, and he did not fear to die if he could punish Darius and his confederates.

"They refuse me the money," he mused. "I will not link myself with such rogues. All I can do is to denounce them and put an end to my life. It was a splendid dream I had, but it was not to last."

Leaning his brow upon his hands, he was giving way to the blackest reflections, when a slight sound made him raise his head.

A woman stood before him. He regarded her with a vacant eye, for by her pallor and white garments he might naturally take her for a phantom.

"It is I, Pierre," said Lucette softly.

He started like one abruptly awakened. It was the Lucette who was his first love, and who now was again intermingled with his life by a strange fatality. By accident, nay by design perchance, she had put on clothes such as she formerly wore. Her fair hair, combed back off the forehead and held by a plain ribbon, and her white frock caught in at the waist by a blue sash, had transformed the Baroness de Ravenstein into a common peasant girl—the simple merry maid who had been the playmate of Pierre's boyhood. He forgot the scenes of the previous night, the adventure on the roof of the Hôtel de Ville, the tavern in the Rue de la Calandre, and the emotions of the gambling-table.

Darius, the Italians, and all the hateful visages that haunted him vanished as Lucette appeared, like hobgoblins at dawn. He rose to embrace his former sweetheart. But she repelled him gently, and sat by him, holding out her hand.

"Pierre," she faltered, "you know that I am in the power of another."

"Ah, true! I had forgotten that as completely as you did your vows of love at Langeais," retorted he bitterly. "I thank you for reminding me that you are the Baroness de Ravenstein, and, as such, a stranger to me."

"You are cruel, Pierre."

"Did you show me any pity, madame, when you wrung my heart casting me off without one regret for our love?"

"How do you know I did so?" she slowly said.

"What!" returned the grenadier, "would you dare to tell me that you did not fling aside my affection like a wreath that ceased to please you? that you even thought of your loving swain when you cowardly fled with that villain. But I understand," he continued, looking round, "this mansion is well worth the cottage of old Coignard. You could not live without luxury, fine dresses and jewels."

"You are wrong, my friend," replied the baroness, regarding him almost supplicatingly.

"A truce to acting, madame," said the grenadier, his voice shaken by passion. "I do not know the aim of the part you are playing, but I warn you that it will be a failure. I came here to defend my money and my life against scoundrels. You are their confidante, their associate, no doubt; you must feel that this is an inappropriate time to remind me of the past."

The baroness blushed, and her eyelids became moist; and, laying her hand on her reproacher's arm, which made him start, she said:

"Hear me, Pierre, and then judge me."

"Cease such high-flown talk!"

"You loved me when I was a pure young girl, and then you knew the very bottom of my heart. It held a simple, sincere love, but also a child's coquetry. I loved you, but I also liked pleasure and brightness—all that delights a girl of sixteen. That man came to Langeais; he spoke as I never heard tongue before, telling me that I was beautiful beyond the fairest ladies—that I was born for the fascinating life of great cities, and he scornfully mocked at my modest fate in Touraine. I listened to him with a pleasure mixed with terror. I was afraid of him, and yet I let myself be beguiled."

"You tell me the old, old tale of all the tempted and fallen. Bah! However, if it amuses you, go on."

"I was weak, yet the sight of you would have saved me; but you had been sent by your father to finish your apprenticeship in Paris, and mine had no time to watch over me. Not a soul to defend me! and I fell by an infamous piece of treachery, for which the villain must answer to Heaven."

"Meanwhile you are his companion," retorted Coignard, coldly.

A tear rolled down her cheeks.

"True, I am his mate," she responded with growing emotion, "I have accepted his hateful rule, and I share his shameful existence. Well," she boldly added, "it was because I loved you that I consented to link my life with the wretch's."

"Ha, ha, ha! this is going too far," sneered Pierre; "you must think me very credulous to talk so impudently to me."

"Do not interrupt me," continued Lucette. "Never more shall I allude to the past, but I shall henceforth possess the courage to go on to the end. Have you the courage to hear me out? When I fell into that monster's snare, I comprehended the whole amount of my love for you. The simple maiden had loved you unwittingly, the deceived woman adored you. If I had loved you less, Pierre, I should not have

run away from home, I should have awaited your return to throw myself at your feet, and perhaps you would have forgiven me; but I was proud because I had had your affection, and I wanted none of your pity. So I followed my destroyer, and only then gauged the full horror of my destiny. By the most cowardly wrong I was chained to the vilest of men, and I had to suffer every torture and humiliation. But I suffered without murmuring, wishing to expiate."

Lucette spoke in that moving accent which touches the heart because it comes from the heart, and her hearer was affected by profound pity. The self-accuser was not false, and she could not lie now. The man felt his own eyes water as he heard this story of frustrated love, and his hand was held out to the lost bride.

"Thank you, Pierre, your scorn would have pained me much," she said, weeping.

"Poor girl! you have undergone a great deal."

"But you, Pierre—what have you been doing, how have you lived these five years? Tell me your hopes and your sorrows. All that concerns you is of interest to me."

"But I suppose you know what brings me here," returned Coignard with reviving distrust. "Darius must have told you."

"I know there is a secret between you of which he dreads the outcome—for he ordered me to do my utmost to decide you to enter the band he commands."

"Does he think so little of you as to make you his decoy for the man you loved?"

Lucette cowered beneath this sarcasm, and with a look of reproach she replied:

"You must know that he is ignorant of our old attachment. Can you really believe that I would consent to play such a disgraceful part?"

"In plain language, what do you want with me, Lucette?" said the soldier, disarmed by her plaintive accents.

"I—I only wish to save you, Pierre."

"Save me!"

"Yes, to tell you what life awaits you if you join the villains who have vowed to be your ruin."

He snapped his fingers.

"Do you not understand what rogues they are? the most atrocious crimes would not make them draw back."

"I know all that and I do not fear them."

She shook her head sadly.

"Pierre, you are brave, but what use is bravery against Carretti's infernal strategy? an Italian whom I detest, and who has found out the secret of our former love. For he prompted Darius to select me to talk you into joining them. 'Tis he, doubt it not, who lays the snare into which you will fall."

"They dare not, Lucette! I hold their very lives in my grasp, and if any mishap meets me, they know my death will be avenged."

"So you are resolved to enter on that road of crime which leads undeviatingly to the prison or the scaffold? What interest can urge one so pure and noble to incur infamy?" She hid her face in her hands, but suddenly she exclaimed: "Oh! I was a fool not to have guessed it.

Pierre, you are in love ; for some woman you would lose your honour and risk your life."

He cast down his eyes without a denial.

"So you love this woman greatly!" went on the baroness, becoming pale as a corpse.

"You do not understand me," said Coignard at this outburst from the blighted heart; "I have no inclination to band myself with these ruffians, and no need of your counsel to refuse their offers."

"What do you come here for, then?"

"A most simple errand. Last night I was robbed here by the mock Chevalier de Kadersac, who is a regular swindler, you know. I claim of his confederates restoration of the cash I lost, upon receiving which I promise you I will never more set foot in this house."

"They will never restore it you," said Lucette. "Darius holds his gold as dear as life, and I have heard Carretti tell him that he has a sure means to constrain you to his conditions."

"So have I a sure means, and if they do not pay me, they all shall die," said the grenadier, with a menacing downward sweep of his open hand like that of an axe.

"Is it only for money's sake that you engage in a life or death struggle?" queried Lucette, turning thoughtful.

"It is," replied the offended Coignard curtly. "I am not a rich man; I do not keep a mint in the Catacombs."

"Suppose I restore you the sum?"

"I repeat I shall never more see Darius or his gang."

"Or me, eh, Pierre?" her tremulous voice interrupted.

"You? perhaps," he answered with visible hesitation.

"If I were sure of that—that I might again see and hear you—if I had the hope you would pardon me, that you would not scorn the woman you once so fondly loved, I would find the energy to rise out of the gulf in which I am plunged. Oh, Pierre, mark this," continued she enthusiastically, "I do not ask for your love, of which I am not worthy; no—I shall give you my life, my devotion as your servant, ay, your slave. Speak a word, only one, and I will get you that gold. Darius shall give it you."

Pierre still kept silent, with lowered head.

"You will not answer? Ah, you still scorn me!"

"I do not scorn you, Lucette. I pity you, and I do not wish to deceive you. As soon as I have the money, I will go hence."

"Go! whither?"

"Out of France."

Lucette regarded him fixedly as if to read his soul in his eyes.

"Alone?"

"Quite!"

"When?"

"To-morrow, if I can."

"Well, yes," cried Lucette in an outburst of tenderness, "flee this sanguinary land and the monsters with whom I am doomed to dwell; flee, for they mean to kill you; and if I am not murdered by Darius, I shall rejoin you. To-morrow you shall have that money, so that you needn't remain a day longer in this infamous city. Now, learn this—

you believe yourself powerful because you know their secret ; but they know yours."

" Mine ? "

" Yes ; Darius has dogged you. He learnt that you guarded the flight of an exiled nobleman and his daughter. He saw them take a boat from the Ile des Cygnes, and he holds this secret as a crushing weapon. If you resist him, he will inform against you, and you will perish on the scaffold with those you sought to save."

" They are in safety by this time, and I can take care of myself."

" You are wrong, Pierre. The league of counterfeiters is powerful, and has members in Normandy. The flight of your friends has already been signalled thither ; and, if you reject Carretti's proposals, they will be arrested before they can go aboard a ship."

The soldier leaped up with flashing eyes and contracted mouth.

" They will be arrested ? Where, and how ? tell me ! Why don't you speak ? "

Having seized Lucette's arm, he shook it as if to wrench it off.

" Where ? at Rouen, where they will sleep to-morrow night ? How ? by Darius's confederates, to whom the order runs from town to town. I tell you they will die ; but what matters that to me ? You shall be saved, Pierre."

" Arrested ! she will be dragged to the scaffold ! " groaned the grenadier, bewildered. " No, no ! better a hundred times death or shame to me. Where is Darius ? where are they ? let them haste !. I will coin with them, rob with them, murder with them—do any deed they name, so long as Rosa is not harmed."

" Rosa ! " repeated Lucette, paler than before. " Miserable woman that I am ; he loves her."

The door opened, and the Italian showed his crafty visage. He was alone, and he came in smiling.

" I hope, friend Coignard," he said in a honied voice, " that you have not found time hang heavily on your hands, thanks to the lady's company. I am sorry to be the bearer of a refusal. Unfortunately, we are out of money, and unless you will attempt the active speculation I hinted at with us, I do not really see——"

" I accept," said the grenadier, still agitated by emotion.

" Oh ! my dear fellow, how happy I am to see you at last one of us."

" I accept on two conditions," Coignard hastened to add.

" Name them."

" First, I am to have my share immediately after the affair ; next, my friends are to be sacred for you. Do you understand ? " he said, grasping Carretti's arm.

" I do, clearly, and I answer for your friends and your money."

" How he loves her ! " murmured Lucette.

" Then, I'm your man," resumed the soldier. " What's to be done ? "

" To-morrow at midnight, be in front of the Église des Petits-Pères."

" I shall be there."

" With your tools, please. We reckon greatly on your professional skill to succeed, and I can tell you, we would not undertake the matter without you."

" Whom are we to rob ! " inquired the apprentice housebreaker with a bitter smile.

"The citizen Arcandier, whom you met last night. You remember, the enriched army contractors are our pet prey?"

"To-morrow. I shall be punctual. Good-bye for the present." said the grenadier, coldly bowing to Lucette, and departing without taking the hand Carretti held out.

"Capitally managed, baroness," cried the latter, roaring with laughter, "you have not your parallel for taming Tartars. Thanks to your ladyship, we shall have the purveyor's money-bags to-morrow, and be rid of this bothersome swash-buckler."

"Be rid of him? Do you mean to kill him?"

"Nay, nay, madame; merely send him to gaol or the block."

"You are right; let him die," cried Lucette in a fit of fury, "let him die!"

"So he shall—wager on that, baroness."

"I wish that noble and his daughter to perish, too!"

"Oh, the Spanish woman? That's easy also. The word has gone on to our brothers in Normandy, and, if you are so bent on it, they will be caged in a couple of days."

"Indeed, I wish it."

"It's a settled affair. Now, baroness, come and have supper, for I believe Darius is getting jealous."

He left the room merrily, leaving Lucette alone in the vast apartment.

"If it had not been for that woman," she screamed, melting in tears, "I should have saved him!"

XI.

THE SAFE-ROOM.

THE history of robbery in the Reign of Terror has yet to be written. It will be interesting, for the army of crime at this vexed period little resembled what it has since become. Formed of the remnants of the old society and the scum of the new, it operated openly, and its companies of brigands marched and attacked very much as in warfare. The police had other business in hand than looking after housebreakers, and there was almost assured impunity for nocturnal enterprise.

Whilst the agents of the noted lieutenant of police, Lenoir, were political spies for the Committee of Public Safety, the old gangs gathered anew and took not even the pains to conceal themselves. In the suburbs the Chauffeurs revived the traditions of Mandrin, merrily toasting the soles of misers who would not discover their hoards, and more than once, under the Directoire, a band of ruffians were seen besieging a house in broad daylight.

Nevertheless, felony under arms was not organised in 1794 as it was a few years later, and the rascaldom enrolled under Darius and others more particularly attended to false-coining, thieving for pastime. It must be remarked that, while theft was easy, it was far from profitable.

The great fortunes of yore had disappeared, trade was nothing to speak of, and the present-day rich men carefully hid their harvest. None but the army contractors were seen keeping open house and

openly flaunting large accumulations. These were rare also, and Arcandier, the ammunition provider, might pass for an exception. As he gambled, received plenty of company, and kept a splendid mansion on the Boulevard des Capucines, Darius and his comrades in cupidity had long ago marked him down.

As Carretti put it, they had studied the job. At this period of disorder, the housebreaker's crux was not to get into a dwelling, but to find the cash. They did not shrink from smashing a strong-box, but they had much trouble to discover it.

In our days, a banker's safe is under the public eye and parades its chilled steel plates and subtle locks. It is a fortress which none dream of attacking. At that period, money did not defend itself but went into hiding. It was the age of secret presses, hollow walls, and double-bottomed drawers, and when an old house is pulled down, the honest house demolishers find sacks of coin walled up by some timorous wealthy proprietor of the past century. Such hiding-places were the butt of the revolutionary thieves who seldom tried a "crack," unless perfectly informed upon the whereabouts of the hoard. Thus it was with Darius's gang.

Carretti, who, thanks to his manner, was alone entertained by the contractor, had surprised his place of concealment after long searches, and he had only waited for a favourable occasion. Chance gave him this, and the sly Piedmontese had based a plan upon Coignard's assistance with almost certain success.

Hence the four brigands assembled on the Place des Petits-Pères chatted gaily, whilst awaiting the new adherent. Charmed with the prospect of being quit of a dangerous foe, Darius himself seemed almost in good humour, and showed the sullen joviality of a bear in glee.

"I say, Carretti, it looks like killing two birds with one stone," he chuckled coarsely.

"Just so, or rather, bagging one and knocking over the other," responded the Italian. "To-night the silver pieces will be ours and the grenadier be in the grip of the police."

"I shall not be at ease though, so long as this Coignard lives, and if you can shut him up for ever, I would like it deuced better."

"Impossible, the baroness would be down on me for that. I fancy she has a leaning towards the handsome warrior."

"That's not so !"

"How can you help it ! my poor Darius," retorted the Piedmontese amused at his mate's rage, "women like the soldier's coat, and then again, you are no beauty."

"That's all very fine," growled the trooper, "just you keep your thoughts to yourself, or think rather of putting Coignard in a hole. I'll take care of the baroness marching in step with me."

"Indeed, that's your duty, my pretty champion," laughed Carretti. "I never step into family jars."

"I only hope this tardy soldier will come !"

"The quarter to midnight has sounded, so we shall have him here in twenty minutes, just the time for a pipe."

He was not mistaken, for Coignard was on the way to the important rendezvous. He had passed a frightful day, upset by the news of the danger overhanging Rosa, Thirsty for vengeance upon the scamps who

aimed at her life, and furious at being involved in their snares, the unfortunate grenadier had struggled terribly with himself. Albeit he had gone through many befouling situations, he had remained honourable, and on the threshold of crime he felt that inborn repugnance which is man's last preservative when drawn towards evil despite himself. But the impulse was too strong and soon silenced his final scruples. What mattered the means to him who only cared for the end? To scale a wall, pick a lock, dare the hulks and mayhap death, what was all this as the price of the certainty of seeing Rosa Marceon again?

"To-morrow," he thought, "I shall be out of Paris never to return. My country henceforth is Spain. One night of shame and danger for an entire life of bliss—that's not too much."

The die was cast, and Pierre Coignard a lost man.

So soon as he had made up his mind he applied himself to ensuring success with the coolness of an old soldier about to go into action. He equipped and armed himself as for his expedition to the Hôtel de Ville, and started for Montreuil at dusk. He wished to see his brother to confirm his instructions, bent on carrying with him the certainty of being avenged in case of accident.

Alexandre, a brother always fondly loved, was five years his elder and nowise resembled him. He was a worthy peasant, unrefined by his stay in the Paris suburbs, and his intellectual horizon did not extend beyond the walls on which his fruit-trees were spread. The honest tiller's affections were solely for his garden and his younger brother, little Pierre, as he always called him. He loved him as a father his son, and what is more, sincerely admired him.

He never would allow himself to argue over an opinion or order of his junior, whose superiority he acknowledged; his devotion for him was blind, and the grenadier could be sure that his commands would be punctiliously executed. Their interview was not long.

Alexandre did not suspect the danger his brother ran, and the latter deemed it totally useless to inform him. He merely reiterated what was to be done in the event of his not appearing on the morrow, and he quitted him with controlled emotion.

He was rapidly going down towards the city when Alexandre ran after him to hand him a packet left for him by a man. The envelope was of grey paper, and the whole had the form and weight of an official missive.

"It's my discharge," said the grenadier lightly. "I wager the colonel writes me that if I do not return to the battalion, I shall be declared a deserter. As I have no desire to return, to-morrow will be time enough to study his epistle."

After which reflection he pocketed the packet and mended his pace, for the road was long from Montreuil to the Petits-Pères. By a singular gift of his fickle temperament, in proportion to the approach of the decisive moments Coignard felt his lingering hesitations fade away, so that, on arriving at the trysting-place, his honest scruples had yielded to a determination to win at any price.

"Is that you, brother C.?" challenged Carretti, standing sentry at the church corner, when he spied the grenadier coming out of the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Victoires.

"The man himself."

"You hit it off to a tick—midnight's still sounding. That's something like military punctuality."

"Enough! march forward, since we are all at hand. I have not come to receive compliments."

"Forward, then. I will explain our plan on the way. Guard the rear, Darius, old mate; L'excellent, take the lead; Saffieri, come next me, and all make for the Boulevard des Capucines."

The band proceeded in the order laid down by Carretti, who took the direction of the expedition. Thus the recruit was cooped up in the centre, and flanked by the Italians.

"I was saying I would put you up to the plan. Here it is in a few words. Arcandier has two money-chests. The one in his office, exposed to all-comers, only contains paper-money, the reason we give it the cold shoulder. The other is in a kind of cave, built in the dining room wall. This contains the right stuff, the gold and silver pieces bearing the tyrant's head—a bad thing for a servant of the Republic to cherish—but we'll soon put that to rights. I know the spot where we must cut through the wood-work, and I shall take you straight to it. But behind the wainscot is an iron door, and there we must prove your skill and handicraft. You have your tools with you, I suppose?"

"I carry everything in my kit."

"Very good. Arcandier sleeps in the other part of the house, his clerk beside the box of *assignats*, and the servants roost in the lofts. So you can work away quite at leisure."

"How do we get in?"

"It is as easy as to scare Darius. There is a wood-yard next the garden, and the piles of planks are put there as if expressly to be our ladder. You can soon see that, for we have arrived."

Arcandier's garden ran along the Boulevard des Capucines, in a real desert of a quarter, now the busiest in Paris. Huge trees, cut down during the Revolution of 1848, shaded a muddy footway where nobody ventured after sunset, and, towards the Place Vendôme, spread waste land previously the property of the Capuchins confraternity.

Carretti had conducted his party with the intelligence of an experienced chief, taking good heed not to go up to the doomed house by the main street. On that side, in fact, it was protected by a very high wall, not to be crossed without a ladder. Round the corner, on the contrary, an enormous collection of builder's timber set against the wall singularly facilitated the escalade, and here the Italian directed them to the attacking point. Without encountering any obstacle they reached the base of the wood, where he deemed it necessary to halt and give his comrades their instructions.

It was a black night. A very high westerly gale drove heavy rain-clouds before it and attacked the old elm boughs. The very weather for a night surprise.

"The devil is on our side," remarked the Piedmontese; "the job will go on by itself."

"In such a tempest, it is a fact that we run no danger of meeting old Arcandier out for an airing under his fig trees," said Darius, still in good humour.

"He had four of his friends to dine with him to-day," said the other Italian. "He must be sleeping away like a dozen watchmen."

"We're losing time, and you'd better explain what we have to do," interrupted Coignard.

"Right he is," replied the leader; "work first—jokes afterwards. For we are going to have some fun, eh, old mate?" he added to Darius, who grunted approvingly.

"Will you never have done, hang you all!" cried the grenadier testily.

"Here goes, then, dear fellow, with all intention to be short and clear. We number five: two to watch and ensure a retreat, and three for the attack. Darius, stay on the wood pile and take care of this knotted rope, which we are going to fasten to this small coping to let us down into the court-yard. In case of alarm, whistle twice."

"Lovely! so you can pocket the cash without me being by," sneered the trooper, not over pleased with his share in the plot.

"Idiot! you will have the gains without the pains," said Carretti. "Should there fall any blows, would you rather be under them? Go to, hold your tongue, and let me finish."

"All right; I'll be dumb."

"Saffieri," continued the captain, "stay you at the staircase door to see that they do not box us in like rats in a trap. LExcellent, who is another Hercules for strength, will stride on before us to fell any interferers. Coignard and I will alone work at the hiding-place. What do you think of my plan, dear comrade?" he inquired of the novice.

"It suits me well enough," answered he, "particularly as I have something to help LExcellent in case of need," he continued, showing a brace of pistols which caused Darius to make a wry face.

"Then forward, march!" commanded Carretti, beginning to scale the pile.

In a few instants the whole party was united again alongside the crest of the wall on a platform of oak planks closely packed. The knotted rope firmly attached to a large balk, and confided to Darius's keeping, enabled them to descend into the grounds. The first to pass down was Carretti, our hero following closely, and both reached the earth without accident. Only a few paces off rose the high house front, black and silent.

"Not a light, not a sound," observed Carretti in a whisper, "everybody is snoring. This is the very moment to prove that fortune does not come to the sleeping."

With a steadiness of step indicating perfect acquaintance with the ground, he crossed straight to a small door that led into a narrow staircase.

"Here begins your task, comrade," he said to Coignard, "but this trumpery plank will not delay you long."

Before he had finished speaking, the ex-locksmith had opened his kit, and selected a picklock which he thrust into the lock. The door opened into an inner yard; it was merely once locked, and the bolt flew back at the first turn.

"Stand you here," said Carretti, "and don't stir when you hear the gun go off."

But suddenly, even as they were crossing the threshold, two prolonged whistlings pierced the deep stillness of the night.

"Tis Darius giving the warning," whispered the Italian.

"A thousand thunders! we are caught."

"Stay here, you two, till I see what it really is."

He darted towards the wall. Coignard cocked his pistols and waited. No sound succeeded the signal, and he waited and watched uselessly, for nothing betokened the approach of danger. Through the gloom he could dimly distinguish Carretti, reascending the rope, and he believed he saw him disappear on the other side of the wall. Had the Italian fallen into a trap, and was the house surrounded? Beginning to fear as much, he made ready to sell his life dearly. A quarter of an hour dragged by, very long to Coignard. He could not rely upon either Saffieri or L'excellent, both appearing frightened, and he concluded that he would have to resist capture to the death.

"Be it so!" he muttered, "a bullet in the head is better than the galleys. Let the enemy come; I am ready."

He was grasping the pistol handles convulsively, when a human form was outlined in black on the whitewashed wall, and a familiar voice called him by name.

"Tis I! do not fire," said Carretti, his calm tone indicating no serious danger impended.

"Well?" questioned the soldier.

"A false alarm, comrade; we can go on."

"But what made Darius give the warning?"

"You know he is not brave. Well, he fancied he saw somebody coming. He's frightened of his own shadow," rejoined the Italian with some hesitation.

Coignard could not make out his features, but he fancied the speaker was repressing with difficulty a strong desire to laugh, and he determined to be more than ever on his guard. This mirth seemed suspicious.

"Let's lose no time," proceeded Carretti, hurriedly, apparently eager to end this questioning. "Instead of talking, let's be working. We will want light now."

The soldier struck a spark on a match and lit a dark lantern. The leader went up a long passage to a low door.

"Here we are," he said to Coignard.

"What? Arcandier keeps money here?"

"No; this is the door leading from the kitchen to the dining-room; but open it, and you will see."

It was not locked. Coignard walked into an immense room, which his feeble light could scarcely make visible. It was a dining-hall, built in the grand style of the Louis XIV period, and the contractor had good enough taste to let it alone. Superb sculptured wood-work covered the high walls, and ponderous sideboards in old oak, loaded with glass ware and plate, filled the lower part of the wainscoting.

"The vendor of old horse and mill-stone flour takes jolly good care of himself," said L'excellent, with a coarse laugh, "and I reckon the feeding is good here."

"You shall dine here when you are a rich army supplier," said the Italian. "In the meanwhile, just come over here and shift this buffet."

The strong man obeyed, and began to pull one of the sideboards out.

"Whew ! it's a heavy one. Is it full of silver plate ?"

"You are too inquisitive. Draw it out, and you will see afterwards."

The massive piece of furniture finally gave way, and revealed a panel like any of the others.

"There it is," said the Piedmontese.

"Where ?" queried the soldier.

Carretti stooped down and heavily pressed one of the roses carved in the frame, whereupon the panel slid aside and exposed an iron door.

"Now, comrade," he said to the stupefied grenadier, "my part of the work is over ; begin yours."

Still the other remained petrified before the strange revelation, wondering by what infernal cunning their guide had unearthed a place of concealment which Arcandier might well believe was beyond all discovery. He forgot to move.

"Your ten thousand livres are inside," went on the Italian tranquilly.

This speech recalled the grenadier to his senses, and he grasped his tools like a soldier flying to arms. The obstacle was of a nature to discourage the most skilful, the studded front seeming solid enough to defy all assaults. To pry it open was impossible ; the attempts were restricted to picking the lock. After many fruitless trials, the amateur burglar succeeded so far as to move the bolts back, but the door would not open. Evidently a peculiar mechanism came into play and fettered the last turn of the key. Coignard reflected.

"Dullard that I am !" he suddenly exclaimed, "I made such an error for the lord of our manor."

Without hesitating he put his foot on a knob at the bottom right hand corner, and, sure enough, the door flew open.

"The deuce, comrade ! it turns out that I was right to rely on your talent," commented the Italian. "You are as irresistible to doors as to women ; without you we should not have got on at all."

His astonishment was natural enough at an age when strong rooms were still secured on primitive systems. The old puzzle-letter locks which amused Louis XVI and which, improved into permutation locks, have realised the "Open Sesame !" of the Arabian Nights, these were rare, and Coignard might have set up for a wizard on the strength of having opened Arcandier's hiding place, but the grenadier had other aims. There was the gold which would enable him to find Rosa again almost within reach ; the last barrier had fallen and the goal for which he had sacrificed everything was attained.

"Let us in," cried he, his eyes sparkling with delight.

"In with us !" added the Italian, "but let us beforehand prevent the door flying back upon us. I distrust the artful devices of this old fox, Arcandier."

"A sound precaution," agreed Coignard, "for I know all about these doors—they cannot be opened from inside."

"LExcellent, old fellow," said the Piedmontese, "prop the door back with your crowbar. I have no wish to sleep on a bed of riches."

The Hercules hastened to execute the order, and to enter the money-room with evident gratification,

"Stop a bit," said his leader, "your bar is all very well to prevent it closing, but a man is still better, and I'd like you to stay by it to forfend any accident."

The Fleming did not appear to see the wisdom of the extra precaution.

"Don't you understand," added Carretti, roughly, "that if Arcandier or any of his people are on the prowl, they would only have to kick away that crowbar and slam the door, to have us in a tight box; whilst with a sentinel on the watch, we would have time to rush out and settle them. So stay here and do not grumble. Come along, you! I'll go first, Coignard hold the light," he added, showing the way to the grenadier.

The little low door of the vault gave no idea of its extent and arrangement. The dining-room wall was hollow throughout its length and height; or, to put it plainer, a space of about six feet broad had been left between two walls constructed side by side. From this whim or design of the architect resulted a very narrow but very long and lofty enclosure, not to be suspected unless by comparing the external plan of the house with that of the dining-room. This mysterious hole might conceal a man as well as treasure, for there was ample air, and it may have been intended originally for sheltering outlaws. The army contractor, who only had gold to save, had put his secret fortune in it out of the way of commercial disaster and the Committee of Public Safety, often busy in hunting up such hoards.

"I am getting used to this kind of thing," muttered the grenadier, remembering his adventure in the Council Clerk's store-room, as he looked round on the shelves.

But these shelves held money bags instead of trinkets, and promised a richer booty. Carretti was transfigured. His habitually ironical and obsequious mien had become a frenzied one with the fever of wealth overpowering him. His hands trembled, his eyes shone, and cupidity, the base of his vile character, made him forget everything; alike danger as the care to avenge his friend Darius.

"Let us settle our affairs," he faltered to Coignard in a voice changed by joy.

The grenadier, calmer, was agreeable enough. To him riches were not the goal but the means, and he had only one question as regarded the treasure; would his share suffice to enable him to reach Rosa Marcen? Doubt was not long possible, for the money bags presented so long a line that their contents ought to enrich the band ten times over.

The Italian pointed to them as he walked up and down before the opulent array like a general reviewing troops, and his emotion was so extreme that he forgot to act; Coignard was obliged to remind him that time was so precious that a moment's loss might ruin them.

"You are right, old friend," said Carretti, more endearingly than ever to his new accomplice, "should Arcandier come, we would be forced to kill him, and I am not like Darius whom murder suits. Let us take the lucre and be off. But let me see what the sacks contain in their aldermanic corporations."

Untying one, he dug his hands into it.

"Double-frederics," he said laughing almost hysterically. "It

looks as if our friend Arcandier gets pay from our enemy Prussia. This is a good thing to know in case he kicks up a noise."

As he spoke he poured the glittering coin from hand to hand and listened to the jingle, intoxicated. Coignard quivered with impatience.

"In a hurry to get done, eh?" queried the Italian, giving him a sidelong glance. "Don't fret, we shall not be long now. To get through the sooner we had better form a line like the firemen passing pails of water, or men unloading bricks! Take you the bags and hand them to me that I may hand them again to Lexcellent. Oh! have no fear," he added in reply to a distrustful look; "he will not run away, and three of us will not be too many to carry the lot. At the garden wall you may get over the first, if you like, and we will divide in the timber yard."

"I am in no fear," returned Coignard; "you know, besides, my reasons for being easy."

The Italian made no answer, but a flash of hatred passed from his eyes. The transfer commenced. The Piedmontese placed himself by the door. The grenadier worked with feverish ardour. The heavy bags soon began to be piled up on the dining-room floor and the shelves to be cleared.

"How many more?" questioned Carretti, eyeing the other with increasing attention.

"Three or four at the most, on the farthest shelf."

"Don't leave one; bring them along and let's be off."

"I'll get them," rejoined the grenadier, proceeding to the end of the corridor, lantern in hand.

"Got them?"

"Yes."

"Then keep them, dog of a soldier! they may pay your footing in the devil's house, if devil there be," yelled the Piedmontese, leaping out of the vault.

With a kick, he sent the bar flying before him which had kept back the door, and once out he slammed it to with a dull bang. The stupefied Lexcellent looked on terrified.

"An enemy the less and a share the more for us," said Carretti tranquilly. "Shove the panel back, replace the sideboard and let us make off with the money. Darius is waiting for us, though he is in pleasant company," he added with a roar of laughter.

A howl of rage resounded in the hollow of the wall.

XII.

THE THIEVES' "CROW."

LEFT alone at his post of trust, Darius had so disposed himself as not to be taken by surprise. He had lain down flat on the top of the oak planks, and his eyes could cover at the same time from this observatory the mansion court and the timber yard. He was thus perfectly well protected against assailants, from his ability to see them coming

from any direction. But the patriot trooper did not shine with bravery, and when he saw himself deprived of companionship, his thoughts were far from encouraging.

The office of sentinel, or "crow," as malefactors style their advance picket, did not please him, and he would have much preferred to extract the treasure. As he had no choice he had to content himself with the resolve to call for help at the first advent of danger. With wakeful eye and outstretched neck, he kept looking about him uneasily. The slightest sound caused him dreadful twinges, and he shook all over when a dead bough was broken off by the wind and rattled down in the woodyard. He was in the over-excited state which troubles the sight as well as the senses, when he suddenly perceived a shadow on the wall bordering the Rue des Capucines. It took his breath away but he prepared his whistle. The shadow skulked along the wall, seeming to direct itself towards the pile of oaken planks. There could be no more doubt, somebody had crept into the timber-yard and was proceeding towards the residence. Probably a squad of police agents were about surrounding the gang, and this person gliding through the darkness was their scout. Overwhelmed with fright, and forgetting that the sound would betray him, the trooper gave the signal. The shadow stopped short.

"He will signal for his men now," thought the burglars' look-out, "and I am lost."

But all remained still in the woodyard, and Darius breathed again at only hearing the gravel creak under the hurried tread of the Italian flying to his call. He grasped the knotted cord and climbed vigorously so as to reach the cope-stone of the wall in a few seconds.

"Why did you whistle?" he demanded, sharply.

"Look, look!" gasped the watcher, choking with fear, "there, that man——"

He pointed to the wall where a human shape stood motionless.

"One man!" sneered the Italian, "and you stick to your tower! Did you want to have us all nailed?"

"Do you expect me to go down to get a sword through me?"

"It is plain, old man, that you are much too cowardly, and since you are good for nothing, I will go and have a little talk with this citizen who meddles with our evening's stroll."

Leaving Darius on high, Carretti leaped swiftly to the ground, and rushed upon the stranger, knife in hand. Stupefied by so much boldness, the patriot anxiously looked for the upshot of the inevitable combat in which he was determined not to interfere. All at once a frank, ringing laugh came up from the corner of the wall, and the Italian mockingly and quickly called him:

"Come down, you poltroon! there's no danger."

Little emboldened, the other still hesitated.

"I tell you to come! it's a pleasant surprise. Here's a person who must speak with you."

Still with some disquietude, Darius made up his mind to slide down, and cautiously he went over to the corner of the yard. Carretti was still laughing, but under his breath. He came out a couple of steps to meet him, caught him by the arm, and brought him up to the mysterious being who had caused him so much fright.

"Look, you ass, and learn never again to send up false alarms. You whistled so loud as to bid fair to wake up Arcandier."

Scarce recovered from his fear, and still bewildered by surprise, Darius tried to trace the features of the grim visitor who had come upon him so untimely, but the obscurity allowed him to see only a slender figure, straight and still as a statue, enveloped in an ample cloak from head to foot like an enshrouded corpse, whilst a pulled down hood completely hid the countenance. Petrified with amazement, the trooper durst not approach or touch the singular apparition. The Italian looked on at the pair with his smothered hilarity.

"A lovely picture," said he, "but time is money just now and I must tear myself away to mind my own affairs. I will leave you to come to an understanding. Don't be too hard on our poor hero, dear baroness."

"Baroness!" ejaculated the trooper.

"Yes; haven't you guessed our fair friend could not let you alone."

"Yes, it is I, and I must speak with you," said the woman, throwing the cowl off her face.

"Lucette!" exclaimed the wrathful Darius. "Ha! I know what brings you! you shall pay dearly for this!"

The Italian snapped his fingers, and stole away, saying:

"Do what you please, but, bear your watch in mind. It is for your neck as well as mine, and in your place I would put off the explanation till to-morrow, and return to my watch-tower. Be good, my children, till we meet again," he added, running back to the wood pile.

"What do you want here?" snarled Darius, when left alone with Lucette, in his ill-contained fury.

"What's that to you?"

"Hallo! is this any place for a woman?"

"A woman's place is beside the man she loves."

"That man!" roared he, "you come after him, do you? Well, I promise you you'll not find him."

"You are the man I love," rejoined Lucette coldly, "and it is my duty to keep by you."

"I can do without you, and, besides, you do not gammon me into believing that you scamper about by night from worry about me. No, no! I am not blind, and I saw you longing to get a word with that confounded grenadier during the game of faro."

"Do you imagine I could love any other man than you?" said Lucette, with scornful irony.

"Why not? You left your father very quick to come away with me—why should you not leave me to run away with this dandy?"

This gross quip drew a tear from Lucette who did not know it was borrowed from some Voltairian travesty of "Othello," which the frequenter of the clubs had heard.

"Wretch!" she muttered. "But I deserve this slur from having been weak enough to listen to you."

"That's all very fine talk," he returned, brutally, "but I forbid you meddling with my business, and as for your lover, he'll be done for this very night."

"Would you kill him?" cried Lucette, almost threateningly.

"Ha, ha! it's clear that you are soft upon him, jade!" said Darius.

"Yes, he is going to be killed. We are going to rid our free country of this traitorous soldier, who is nothing less than a spy of the nobles we kicked out, and who is aiming to sell us to the police. I mock at your anger. You may look daggers, but that won't stop us."

She trembled all over, and leaned against the wall for support.

"Do you dare to tell me now that you are not in love, and that you have not come here to colloque with him, if I had been fool enough to let you go by?"

"Well, then, yes, I do love him," broke out Lucette, "and I detest you, Darius! Don't you think I understand you yet, and shall curse you to my dying day for taking me away from my father—robbing me of happiness as even now you are robbing Arcandier of money?"

"Go on, go on," jeered Darius cynically, "I have no fear your words will go any farther, for, on the day when you get me caged in La Force, you will be locked up in the Madelonettes."

"Listen to this," resumed Lucette, recovering calmness at so much impudence, "so long as you tortured me and humbled me I bent my head from having deserved it. If my life were required by you, you might take it; but do not dare harm the object of my love, or by the memory of my mother I shall be your death?"

"Ho! ho!" laughed Darius, "we will see about this. Women do not scare me, and I know how to make them act reasonably. In any case, were I disposed to yield to your caprices, I could do nothing on behalf of your gallant grenadier. You see that I am posted here to watch whilst your honest soldier breaks open the money-box. It's his loss if he gets caught at it."

"Where is he? I must warn him and save him!"

"You had better go and try it on! Climb over the walls, drop down and—Saffieri will split your skull. That's just what he has orders to do, whoever appears."

"Alas! will not my death save him?" moaned Lucette, prostrated.

"Well, there is one way. You might scream the house down, or rather up, and get us all nabbed. Perhaps your charmer will not be executed, but they will send him to the galleys."

Crushed by this infernal logic the unfortunate woman was silent.

"I implore you," she said suddenly, "on my knees I implore you—go and join him and take me with you."

She fell at his feet.

"Do you think that an easy matter!"

"Go tell him that a woman wishes to speak with him. He will believe it is that other," she thought to herself with a bitter smile.

"But I am on duty," replied the trooper, continuing to rail at her coarsely.

"I will stay here and watch in your stead—ay, be killed, if needs be. But do this—spare Pierre's life and I will be devoted to you till death."

"But what makes you think we want to kill your soldier, eh?" queried Darius, fretfully.

"You said so yourself just now. Have you forgotten?"

"I told you the lads had promised me to get rid of him; I did not tell you how, for the good reason that I do not know."

"Is it Carretti who takes it on himself to——" asked Lucette, unable to complete her sentence.

"The very man; he asserted that you asked him to do it."

At this, Lucette hung her head and burst into tears, Darius having reminded her of the death doom which she had uttered on the previous night, when, maddened by jealousy, she had spoken against Pierre. Burdened by this memory, the hapless woman held her peace, musing mournfully on her having lost even the right to reproach the assassins for his death.

Since the perfidious Italian had so cunningly forced her to lay the snare for Coignard into which she herself fell, Lucette bitterly regretted having yielded to a fit of jealous choler. The reaction which always follows violent movements of the heart had exalted her love for Pierre to delirium, though she had cried for his death, and when the fatal hour came of his fate being in the balance she had hastened to defend him. The infamous Darius regarded her evilly, enjoying the cruel effect of his chance phrase.

"However," he pursued, still further to torture the unfortunate woman, "you had better make haste if you want to help him, for I fancy I hear steps in the garden. It is Carretti coming back, the job being over."

"No!" cried Lucette, wildly, "no, that's not possible. I will yet be in time to save him."

She set to running at full speed towards the pile of planks, followed by Darius. As they both reached it, they heard a faint whistling on the other side of the wall, and halted in order to listen.

"Darius, Darius," called the Italian in a guarded voice, "quick, to your place! We have the money bags—come, lend a hand."

Greed made the trooper forget the pleasure of tormenting the woman, and he climbed upon the pile with an agility which was doubled by the joy of success. The baroness felt aware that Coignard's fate was decided, and she anxiously fixed her gaze upon the ridge of the wall where she yet hoped to see the grenadier appear. The Fleming's square head was the first to show.

"Well?" queried the spy, whilst Lucette quivered with emotion.

"It's in the bags, my old mate. The whole lot is at the foot of the wall, and the Italians are handing it up."

The trooper croaked in his joy.

"This is the style of it," continued L'excellent. "You stay there to receive the bags Saffieri tosses to you, whilst I get down on the ground in the timber-yard and catch them from you."

"Good! I am ready," said Darius. "Mind, the baroness is there," he added, grinning, "keep an eye on her. Don't let her slip away."

"The baroness!" repeated the strong man of the gang, amazed.

"Yes, she came smelling about, and I do not want her to go away without us,"

"Don't you fret. You know I am pretty good in grabbing."

"That I know, but she is a slippery customer, so don't let her give you the go-by, I say."

"Rest easy; I shall be deaf to her coaxing and sharp to pounce," answered Lexcellent, rapidly climbing down.

The proposed operation began. The money bags, hurled up by one or the other Italian, were caught by Darius, who cast them down in the woodyard with febrile energy. Each contact caused him nervous shivers, and he could not help feeling the coins through the canvas. It worried him not to see and reckon them. Like Carretti, he had the gold fever. He worked with such ardour that the transfer took less than a quarter of an hour.

"That's all," said Saffieri, as he slung up the last bag.

"We are coming, Darius," said Carretti; "wait for us. I wish to have a couple of words with you on your tower."

In a few seconds the Italians were astride the wall.

"How about the soldier?" inquired the trooper, with his old expression of hatred.

"He will not annoy us any more."

"Killed him, eh? Well and good! dead men alone tell no tales."

"I never said so."

"Then where is he?"

"I'll let you know presently. Let us get down. By the way, is the baroness still below?"

"Of course! and Lexcellent is watching her."

"Good! the story will be rich! Let me talk, and don't shove in your oar. I do not want her to know what has become of the grenadier. I have my story cut and dried, and I warned the Fleming not to contradict me. Away! no, stop! Saffieri, pull up the rope. I do not want to leave traces. Arcandier must not perceive our call upon him."

"He will to-morrow in going to count his savings," said Darius, with a broad laugh.

"Fool!" returned the Italian, "do you imagine he goes there every day? I have put everything back in place in the dining-room, and we shall have plenty of time to turn ourselves before he opens the strong-room. This is what I call a proper crack."

Mute with admiration, his comrade remained agog.

"Come along," said the Piedmontese, rapidly. "Let us share the plunder and chat with the tender baroness."

The unfortunate Lucette, under the guard of Hercules, had not even tried to question him, feeling that no information could be drawn from the brute. To repress the precipitate throbbings of her heart, she held her hand on it. A man approached, whom she recognised, with a start, as Carretti.

"Rejoice, dear baroness! We have completely succeeded," said he, joyously. "Here is Arcandier's golden feathers, and the soldier you detest is no more."

Lucette experienced the shock as if a bullet had struck her, and had no power to speak.

"It is queer, lady," went on the arch rogue, "but the news does not seem to gladden you. Yet you recommended this Hector par-

ticularly to me. I think I can hear you now telling me in the drawing-room: 'Kill him!' You were splendid then, let me tell you, baroness. Hang it all! when you hate, you hate with a vengeance."

This atrocious jesting goaded Lucette into answering.

"So he is dead," she said, slowly.

"Couldn't be more so."

"Who among you slew him?" she demanded in a ringing voice.

"Never a one, baroness."

"How's that?"

"I never like to steep my hand in blood. Do you see, I know Arcandier's residence as if I had built it. In the courtyard is a well on the level of the pavement. It was very dark. The grenadier bore away too much to the left in crossing the yard, and down he went. We had no time to fish him out, you will understand. But don't bewail; sixty feet fall, twenty feet of water—it's a mercy! he'll never come up."

Lucette uttered a stifled scream and swooned away.

"Darius, the baroness is not well," remarked the Italian serenely.

"Just pat her hands and chafe her brow whilst we attend to the funds. Don't be alarmed about your share. We have each more than we can carry."

The trooper went grumblingly to lift up his lady-love, while his confederates piled the booty in larger bags.

"We have done," said the Italian, presently; "come, take your 'regulars,' and bring the lady, if she is in walking condition. It is time to go to bed. You know we dine to-morrow at our dear friend Arcandier's. He must not remark on our weary looks."

The unfortunate woman opened her eyes and murmured:

"He is dead! And it is I who caused it. But I will avenge him."

"Stuff! Let's be off, boys," cried Darius lightly.

XIII.

THE BLACK HOLE.

WHEN the strong-room door shut upon Pierre Coignard, he stood petrified as one at whose feet an earthquake chasm gaped. The ominous boom of the door edge meeting the lintel to seal up his living grave chilled his blood, though several seconds elapsed before the full horror of his situation was realised. At the moment of Carretti's flinging out the last sarcasm, the entrapped soldier was in the depth, and the words did not reach him. At first he thought it was an accident, and leaping to the entrance he struck and called. A peal of ferocious laughter responded. The bag of gold in his hand fell and he uttered a terrible shout: they had buried him alive. Then came a silence and a shock against the side of the wall; the assassins had rolled the sideboard against the panelling. All was over now. Leaning against the metal partition separating him from life, with fixed eyes and collapsing frame, Coignard actually lost the sense of his existence. His mind roved in vacancy, and he thought his whole being was fading away. Broken by

the strange weakness caused by the unexpected sight of danger, his legs bent beneath him. He sank upon the flagged floor, and there remained extended, cold and immovable.

The bold soldier, who had come to the rendezvous of crime with haughty head and blazing eye, lay like a sick child.

For the first time these three days he owned he was vanquished. Through the dreadful adventures his courage had not weakened, and his love for Rosa Marcen had sustained him. But now that he measured the whole profundity of the abyss which swallowed him, he did not even try to struggle.

"I shall never see her," he muttered. "She will wait for one who will never come. She will believe that I broke my oath in fear of Pontis, and she will scorn me as women scorn cowards. A coward, that's what I am! yet it is for her sake I die, and what a death! Without the power to defend myself, much less revenge. Oh, that I could revenge myself!" he suddenly roared, springing on his feet with gnashing teeth and flaming eyes. "I would kill all the gang with my own hand! I would; I will! I will tear out the stones with my nails, if I must, to get from this den and crush them all in their viper nest. Yes, all! Darius, that Italian, Lucette!"

The idea of revenge restored to Coignard his former energy. The soldierly spirit resisted death with the instinct of strife revived in him. One instant sufficed him to recover that tenacious will which had saved him on the Hôtel de Ville roofs, and that lucidity of wit which had preserved him from many another danger. In the excess of his despair he had not sought if there were any chances of escape. But now, with his natural swiftness of conception, he promptly examined if any presented themselves.

It was impossible to leave the vault by strength or art. The walls were two feet thick and the door defied breaking. Besides, he had not an instrument; his kit of tools had remained in Carretti's hands. There was only one means to avoid dying there; to get somebody to open it from the outside. The dining-room was now untenanted, but certainly would not always be so, and by calling or knocking the prisoner could make himself heard. The proprietor would hasten to fly to the rescue of his treasure and the door would be opened. It was necessary, therefore, to wait till Arcandier came to take his meals there. Air would be plentiful in a chamber of that capacity. He might reasonably survive until delivered.

"It is about three o'clock," he reasoned. "I have seven or eight hours to wait if Arcandier breakfasts there; fifteen or sixteen if he only comes for dinner. I shall still have time to kill that crew before night comes again." But a frightful thought suddenly blighted this prospect; deliverance was disgrace. He had forgotten that. "Instead of death it will be the prison, the galleys," he said with a shudder. "Better a hundred times end all here. I would sooner never see her again than blush before her. If she were to learn I had been a galley-slave I should have to kill myself; I may as well die at once. Die! yes, but how? Slowly, by hunger, in hellish torment—shall I have the endurance?" He turned pale to think of the horrible penalty he was condemning himself to. Suddenly he started with joy.

"I have my pistols still," he said, clapping his hand to his belt. "I hoped they would serve to blow out that scoundrel Darius's brains and now they will ventilate my own. After all, it amounts to the same thing as if I had been shot dead at Valmy."

He took out one of the fire-arms and examined the priming by the lantern's ray.

"It is in good enough condition to send me into the other world," he said, rising. "She will understand that death prevented me coming. Better so than write to her from the Toulon hulks."

He raised the pistol steadily, but his hand stopped, and he fell into another reverie.

"But suppose she learns that I finished my life shamefully like the thief I am! Arcandier will find me dead when he opens this vault. If he recognises me, or if my name comes out somehow, it will be published abroad that grenadier Coignard broke into his safe-room, and perchance Rosa will read of my death in some gazette. Oh, I shall be defamed even in my death!" he roared. "No! he shall not recognise me! If I fire both barrels off at once the bullets will carry my face with the brain pan, and the headless corpse will baffle the contractor."

He considered the situation anew, and then pressing the two muzzles to his temples, he murmured:

"Farewell, Rosa!"

He was pressing the trigger when his fingers opened out; he lowered his hands once again, and he muttered:

"It is written that I shall not go hence post-haste. But it is happy that I thought of it. I am bent on not being recognised, and I have a letter addressed to me in my pocket. What an ass I am! It will not take long to burn it," he added, rapidly, as he opened the lantern, and put near it the missive which his brother had given him at Montreuil. The somewhat thick wrapper would not catch fire readily, and he tore it off in his impatience, saying:

"If the colonel is asking the favour of my company in my company he has wasted his invitation. It is the last letter I shall ever receive in my life," he went on, grimly jesting. "I ought to read it to see what men thought of me. That will not detain me long."

Unfolding the paper, he glanced at the first line, and uttered a loud cry:

"From her!"

His emotion was so great that he fell upon his knees. He commenced to read in an undertone, slowly from the way his hands shook:

"PIERRE (wrote Rosa), we are safe. I write you from Havre Roads, on board the vessel that will take us to Spain, and Bernard leaves us in order to bear you this letter. In an hour, I shall lose sight of the French shores, but I carry away your pledge and I wish to repeat mine. Be it a month, a year, ten years, I shall await you and when you come and say, 'I am here!' I vow to be your wife.

"Do you care to know how I love you, Pierre? A thought came to me in the night when you brought the count's reliquary to the island. You exposed more than life to recover it, your fair fame, too. You might have been arrested, condemned, disgraced, and I know not

what besides. Well, methought that I should love you still, whether branded and made a galley-slave ! Thus do I love you, Pierre, and since you told me to command, you would obey !—I tell you that it is thus I wish to be loved.—Yours wholly,
ROSA MARCEN."

The reader rose up, pale, but transfigured with the radiance of joy.

"For thus I love and thus I wish to be loved," he repeated, kissing the letter. "And was I going to deal death unto myself, and renounce her and the life awaiting me in Spain ? Bah ! what matter prisons and hulks to me now ! Men get from them, escape, and even kill all opponents to flee."

Maddened with love and delight, he pounded on the iron door. "Where is this Arcandier," he shouted with all his strength, "where are his men, his servants, his lackeys ? Come, some o' ye fetch the police and arrest me. I wish to be out of this, even to enter the prison, anything but to rot in this dungeon."

But his calls were beaten back by the thick walls, and the blows that shook the door merely echoed in the dining-room. That part of the mansion was evidently reserved for galas, and the immured man reflected that parties were rare in those troublous times.

Sullen rage seized him as he strode up and down the narrow den like a wolf in a pitfall. He measured the height of the ceiling, felt the walls and sounded the smallest fissures in hopes to pry out some egress. Suddenly he remembered how the Count de Sainte-Hélène's strength and courage had helped him out of the Catacombs.

"I am as good as that noble," he said savagely, "and, though I have to test every stone a dozen times, I will get out of this."

He was still speaking when the lantern shot up a last jet and went out ; the oil was consumed. Coignard uttered a scream of terror—his last chance of escape was gone.

XIV.

THE CROWNING DISH FOR THE FEAST.

WHEN the lantern went out, Pierre Coignard felt that he had no more to hope. He grasped Rosa's letter convulsively, and threw himself down to die.

"Why should I slay myself," he muttered bitterly ; "death will come soon enough, and meanwhile I will think of her."

Around him the darkness and silence of the grave. Invincible drowsiness overcame him by degrees, his ideas became mixed, his eyes closed, and he sank to sleep. It was agitated by spasms and strange dreams. Now and again a sudden pang abruptly aroused him and he writhed on the stones ; at other times he heard Rosa's voice, and saw her great black eyes gazing upon him. She appeared in a long white dress and called him towards a yawning tomb. When this sweet vision vanished, hideous faces mocked and moved around him. Darius's bestial countenance and the Italian's derisive profile showed themselves one after another. Behind them rose Lucette in anger, shaking her hand at him and saying : "Would he were dead !" After these confused

remembrances blank night came, and he went off into unconsciousness. After many hours of such suffering, a dazzling light awoke him with its sharp pain to his eyes. He closed them anew and sought to sleep once more. But a noisy laugh in the sepulchral stillness fully aroused him. He looked and he listened. Over his head two luminous points pierced the blackness, and there were voices in conversation near him.

"The same dream," he muttered, rolling on the stones. "Will death never, never come?"

Beyond the wall, a brazen voice said:

"Well, baroness, what think you of the banquet of our friend Arcandier?"

Coignard shuddered all over.

"Versailles itself never had a merrier feast in its palace," continued the railing voice.

"Carretti!" exclaimed the grenadier, rising with one bound; "I am going mad."

"Truth to tell, one gets a good dinner here."

These words in a harsh voice distinctly traversed the wall.

"Darius! they are all here, it seems. Oh, I hold my revenge," said Coignard, grinding his teeth, and standing up to the lighted spots, whereupon he comprehended all. Two peepholes, probably concealed on the outer side by carvings of the woodwork dado, gave air and sound and light to the cavity. It had been built perhaps to utilise this means of seeing without being seen. The holes were at a man's height, a little above the buffet that masked the door, and large enough to allow the prisoner to view the whole dining-place. Seven persons were seated around a table luxuriously provided. With a shiver of rage the watcher recognised Darius, L'excellent, the Chevalier de Kadersac, the two Italians and Arcandier, on whose right hand sat a woman stylishly attired.

"She, too!" muttered the grenadier.

Lucette, for she it was, seated opposite the strong-room, received the dull-witted host's equivocal compliments with scornful indifference. How were these vultures gathered at the feast of the buzzard?

After the so-well-managed expedition, Carretti's first care was to put in safety his share of Arcandier's fortune. He had been preparing the theft since a long time, and on its success he reckoned to withdraw from the perilous enterprises in which he was involved. Darius's band did not suit him at all, and he had only consented to share in the counterfeiting and burglaries until he found better employment for his talent.

A highly curious character was Signor Carlo Carretti. Born in Genoa and reared in a family never particular how it scraped along, he had come out on the stage. A poor actor but a sharp business man, he saw most of the Italian cities whilst young, and was much less occupied in improving his dramatic gifts than in practising the most complicated intrigues. At the same time, during this nomad existence he acquired society habits, some distinction of manners, and proven coolness. These qualities, aided by the natural cunning of a Genoese, predestined him to play a high part in the mixed society of that age.

Hence he had flown to France at the outbreak of the Revolution

to make his fortune, foreseeing that the convulsions opened a broad career to adventurers of every nation. But his early days in Paris had been hard. Circumstances were too grave to leave much room for attempts at illicit fortune, and the Piedmontese was reduced to associate with knaves of low degree, whose tastes were repugnant to a high class swindler.

His introducer into Darius's gang was his fellow-countryman Safferi, a Venetian gambler, come to France to try to establish a public *faro* bank.

Carretti remained in the band because he recognized in Darius's lady companion a woman who might be useful to his future projects. It was he who inspired the trooper to exalt Lucette into the *Baronesse de Ravenstein*, install her in a luxurious mansion, and attract gamblers to it. He also had recruited the pretended *Chevalier de Kadersac*, a subtle Gascon upholder of Parisian hells, and unrivalled in cheating at play.

The Italian's influence over his mates ensured him command, but he cared little for it, and meditated more refined and productive exploits. His plan was to induce Lucette to quit Darius, and be his decoy upon dupes and his intermediary as regarded speculators. To execute it, his first need was for capital.

Arcandier's strong-room had just furnished him with this, and at the same time he had got rid of Pierre Coignard, an important relief, for the plotter had divined Lucette's passion and perfectly understood that she would not help him as long as she had the soldier worrying her heart. Carretti had, therefore, brought about the poor grenadier's destruction with marvellous craft. He had contrived to excite her jealousy, to utilise Coignard's love and relations with a banished noble to force him to participate in a robbery, and finally by a skilful crime he had suppressed the only man who might be an obstacle.

All had succeeded to a nicety. There was nothing more to do than to profit by the result of his designs to inaugurate a new existence.

His ambition was to become an army contractor, and he relied on Arcandier's initiating him into the speculations on which he intended to found his fortune. To make use of the very man he had pillaged was a strange combination, but Carretti had foreseen everything. He was certain that Arcandier but seldom visited his treasure, from fear of being discovered by his servants. The possession of a large sum in hard cash was punishable by death under the terrible laws then current, and the purveyor carefully concealed his hoard.

Carretti had calculated on the fear of denunciation, and he resolved to continue his connection with Arcandier, to make it more intimate even in order the better to divert suspicion.

On the morrow of the burglary, the contractor, who was not indifferent to Lucette's charms, had invited her and her friends to dinner, and the Piedmontese was strongly determined not to miss this occasion of becoming more friendly with his proposed pilot. Besides, his perverse instinct and inclination for double dealing found particular relish in bringing the very gang who had pillaged the contractor's strong-room to dine with him.

On his pressure, the invitation was accepted, though the less fine

and bold Darius had long hesitated to walk into the lion's den, as he put it. Carretti had demonstrated to him that Arcandier could not have yet discovered the theft, and that, in any event, impudence was the best card. Crushed by sorrow and remorse, Lucette had consented to accompany her consort.

There remained one point to perplex the Piedmontese: What had become of Coignard in the dungeon where he had shut him up? To go and feast in the very room of which one wall immured the unhappy victim, was an access of audacity of which few murderers are capable. But Carretti had coolly calculated all the consequences of his crime. He did not doubt for an instant that the privation of air must quickly kill a man in the secret vault, and he relied that in fourteen hours it would contain a dead body. Therefore they might all go to Arcandier's without fear lest a vengeful voice would mar the feast, and Carretti even promised himself a fiendish pleasure in making Lucette regale near the black hole where her lover had expired. He loved evil for evil's sake.

The division of the gold had been made immediately after the theft, and gave each of the partners a considerable sum for the times, namely, over thirty thousand livres. After that they separated, only to meet the next day in the Rue Guénégaud to go in company to Arcandier's.

"To-morrow again the bliss of your society," said Carretti to Lucette, who had sat at the council without speaking. "Make yourself lovely to bewitch that old ape Arcandier. You owe him that much consolation for the loss of his coin."

He kissed her hand with the free-and-easy ways of a lady-killer of the passed-away monarchy.

"I shall go," said Lucette, briefly.

But when she was alone, she added, with a gesture of menace:

"Another guest will come to this repast of murderers, and he will revenge the dead."

Unaware of this threat, we repeat, the bandits went to the banquet and gaily carried it on to the close. The servants were sent away to let the conversation be less restricted, and the guests began all speaking at once, with the animation characterising a meeting where plenty of wine is flowing. Darius and Lexcellent seemed nearly intoxicated, and the host was rather excited himself, though he pressed them to drink heartily. The two Italians had kept cool, however, and Carretti amused himself by preventing the master from having a dialogue with Lucette.

"My dear Amphytrion," said he, "I have a strong inclination to go into business, and that with you."

"Sooth to say," retorted the contractor, "I would rather take the baroness for my partner. But still I do not say no."

"Capital! I should like to supply eatables," resumed the Italian.

"A good line," replied Arcandier with a broad laugh, "but it takes money."

"So I thought. Could one begin with thirty thousand livres in the ready?"

The host fell back in his chair,

"Pooh! that don't amount to much," he sneered with a millionaire's smile.

"Quite enough to get the man's head chopped off, if any here was denounced for having it. There's no joking with the law about forestalling and hoarding up. But I daresay you take precious good care where you put your solid stuff, eh, Arcandier, old fellow?"

"I—I do not have any," stammered the contractor evidently perturbed. "I respect the law and have nothing but the legal currency."

"Gracious!" said the Italian laughing loudly, "you must have heaps of assignats to give such dinners!"

"I am delighted that my spread pleases you," interrupted Arcandier eager to change the conversation. "I hope that you will come again and again to enjoy it, and that it will be such an improvement next time that our fair friend will be merrier."

"I grant that the dear baroness does not appear very lively this evening," said Carretti. "Not in love, are you?"

"I love nobody," returned Lucette, shortly.

"Dear me! that's not a compliment to poor Darius. Were I he, I should protest."

"And I protest also," said the contractor awkwardly.

The baroness gave him a disdainful look but never a word.

"Yet it strikes me, baroness, that you are not always so insensible," went on Arcandier. "The other night you seemed to take the liveliest concern in the young person whom the chevalier plucked so clean—ha! ha!"

Lucette turned pale, and Carretti hastened to say:

"Tut, he was not dangerous."

"Why not? a very pretty blade."

"Yes; but he's off on a long journey."

"Perhaps hunting for his fortune," broke in Darius, wishful to show how witty he was.

"You've hit it," said the Italian bursting into laughter. "I am afraid we shall never see him again. He was rather too fond of the nobles, eh, baroness?"

Mute and motionless in his prison, Coignard was listening and holding his pistols in readiness.

"What will she say?" he wondered.

Lucette's eyes fired up.

"Better for him that he were dead than uniting his life with that of the outlaws," she answered, in a hollow voice.

"And she also wishes me dead," muttered the grenadier. "Why did I hesitate to destroy her with them?"

"Pshaw," went on Arcandier, "we know that the baroness is a sound patriot. Let us drink her health, and let the absent take care of themselves."

"Yes, to the living!" cried the Italian, raising his glass. "The dead never come back, and——"

Bang! went an explosion, which shook the hall, and the glass flew to shivers from between Carretti's fingers. All the guests started, and the host looked round with horrified eyes.

"There! there!" he faltered, pointing to the wall; "a pistol shot came from there."

Though very white, Carretti endeavoured to smile, but Darius and the others rushed from the table towards the door. Lucette, however, had not budged when the servants, attracted by the detonation, entered the room. Their master's face offered a curious expression, struggling, as he was, between the desire to save his treasure and the dread of revealing its lodgment. Avarice obtained the upper hand.

"Help me to displace this sideboard," he gasped in affright.

Nobody responded. The dismay of the guests was complete.

"Let's be off," muttered Darius, in consternation; "it's the dead revived."

"Idiot!" whispered Carretti, "our cue's to stay, most decidedly. Don't you understand that the starving soldier has blown out his brains in his coop. He chose his time inopportunistly; that's all the harm."

With his other pistol in hand, Coignard viewed the strange picture, through the wall, of the confounded rogues, and waited results with the calmness of one ready for anything. His trick had fully succeeded.

"They believe me dead," he reasoned. "The door will be opened. With my remaining bullet I will overawe them, and march out of the house with nobody to stay me."

Forgetting his fright in the defence of his ducats, Arcandier was still trying to move the heavy furniture from before them, till Carretti recovered enough coolness to lend him a hand. Paler than the dead, Lucette stood by with her eyes fixed on the wall. The buffet yielded, and left the panel bare. The luckless contractor shrank from revealing the whole secret.

"Come, come, my dear host, open the strong-room," said the Italian.

"We are quite a family party, and we shall not inform against you."

Indeed, Darius and his mates had expelled the servants from the apartment, and this speech decided Arcandier to press the spring and reveal the iron door.

"Very ingenious!" said the Italian, more and more reassured because convinced of Coignard's suicide. "Make haste, for one never knows what next may happen."

The contractor set his foot on the knob which the grenadier had discovered overnight, took a key from his pocket and introduced it into the keyhole. But he paused on the verge of opening. Heavy steps were heard in the outer room and the thud of muskets being grounded. A domestic burst in at the door, shouting:

"The guards, the guards!"

A dozen soldiers led by a corporal showed themselves at the door. Two men followed, one, wearing a tri-coloured scarf, was evidently a city official, and the other, clad like a well-to-do master gardener of the suburbs, seemed to be his guide.

"That's Alexandre Coignard, his brother," observed Carretti to Darius in a low tone; "we are dished!"

The trooper was looking round for some hole into which to creep.

"That pot-herb raiser never could have guessed that we were all

going to dine here," whispered the Italian. "Who's the blackguard who's sold us?"

"If you want to know, look at the baroness," rejoined Saffieri. Indeed Lucette was the only one of all the terrified band who looked at the soldiers without wincing. Her eyes flashed and her extended hand pointed out the guilty group, like a statue of vengeance.

"Which of you is the citizen Arcandier?" questioned the civil officer.

"It is I," replied the contractor in an unsteady voice, reproached by his conscience with many short-comings as a government contractor and daunted by the scarf of office.

"Citizen, this honest fellow came to tell me that you had been robbed, and that thieves would be dining with you this evening."

"Thieves—in my house?" muttered the host, blanching visibly.

"Yes, thieves, and worse, for they are believed to have killed one of their gang between them, which we shall ascertain presently. Meanwhile, who are the persons known as Darius, Carretti, Saffieri, L'excellent and Kadersac?"

"Of what are we accused?" demanded the chief Italian, stepping forward impudently.

"I have said what. Burglary and murder."

"There's been no burglary or murder committed here. Ask citizen Arcandier. Has he laid any complaint of his strong-room being broken into?" As he spoke, he fastened his eyes on the unfortunate contractor.

"Certainly not," faltered the latter, trembling at being obliged to acknowledge that he hid away gold, "I—I make no complaint. To begin with, I have no money save assignats."

"In what may be called your regular money-box, I daresay," said the municipal officer, unable to keep from smiling, "but in the wall there, you keep something else than paper."

"Citizen," broke in the Piedmontese, fully aware that nothing but boldness would get them out of it, "we are victims of some error. Indeed, some extraordinary event is going on here, and there may have been an attempt to rob our friend Arcandier; for, at the very moment when you arrived, we were looking for an intruder. But as for murder, I assure you that we have killed nobody. The dinner is too good here to inspire such naughty notions."

Pale but threatening, Lucette intervened.

"Have that door opened, citizen," said she, pointing to the panel. "You will find a dead body there, and these are the murderers," she added, withering Darius and the Italian with a look.

"Who is the citizeness?" queried the magistrate, turning towards Alexandre Coignard.

"Tis the lady, my officer," responded he, "who came yesterday to warn me that these villains had killed my poor brother, and that they might be caught here this evening."

"The jade," muttered Darius, "if I had only twisted her neck in the timber-yard, as the inclination moved me, this would not have happened."

"Undoubtedly," said Carretti, "the baroness is too much for us. They will find the dead grenadier in the strong-room. We shall be held to have killed him, and the result is clear."

"Citizen Arcandier, open that door," said the official, sternly.

"But—but, that door——" faltered the contractor.

"It may not be that of your private money-box, but I believe it conceals a mystery on which some light is necessary."

The host felt that he could not longer hesitate, and again put the key in the lock, but his hand trembled, so he had some difficulty in opening it. A striking picture was presented by the dining-room at this juncture.

Carretti, Darius, and their allies seemed, with lowered heads, to be vaguely seeking some outlet by which to flee from the dreadful truth about to overwhelm them. The rigid Lucette turned her face, contorted by anguish, to the fatal door. Alexandre Coignard wept hot tears. The municipal officer remained grave and thoughtful. All expected to see a dead body. The door turned slowly on its hinges, and on the threshold appeared Pierre Coignard with folded arms. His blanched countenance stood out from the dark interior of the vault, and made the beholders shrink back as from a spectre. With two forward steps he came into the full light. An outcry of joy burst forth amid the solemn silence. It was from Lucette.

"Living! he lives!"

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" challenged the municipal officer.

"My name is Pierre Coignard; I am a thief, and these are my confederates," was the grenadier's answer, in a ringing voice, as he pointed menacingly to the appalled ruffians, who were in such a state of stupefaction that not one stirred.

"Are you afraid of one man? Come on; I am unarmed now," proceeded he, throwing down his pistol.

"In the name of the law I arrest you," said the officer.

"Wretch that I am!" screamed Lucette in despair, "I sought to revenge his death, and I destroy him!"

Beneath his scornful look she fell to the floor.

"He is innocent," said Alexandre; "do not take him to gaol!"

"The whole matter must be explained to the public prosecutor," replied the official coldly. "Corporal, conduct these persons to La Force prison. Citizen Arcandier along with them," he added, and thereupon the unlucky contractor groaned. "Oh, now I think of it, lock up your strong-room—where there are no assignats—and hand me the key. The Republic may need to look into it when it goes over your accounts."

The bandits did not attempt to resist, and the soldiers surrounded them before even Carretti could put any fresh idea into action. Pierre Coignard, with proud look and haughty head, had placed himself in the midst of the squad.

"I am ready," he said, in an unshaken voice. "Courage!" he signalled to his brother.

"Left wheel about, forward, march!" called out the corporal to his guard.

"You can stay here to look after the citizeness," whispered the magistrate to Alexandre, pointing to Lucette still in her swoon.

XV

BREAKING JAIL.

ABOUT ten days after the catastrophe that broke up the contractor's dinner party, a man and woman were conversing in an undertone, in a countrified-looking room near the window opening on a garden. Night was coming on, with a heavy atmosphere and a south wind driving huge black clouds towards the little village of Montreuil. The woman was dressed entirely in mourning, and her hair and cap was in the fashion of the suburban peasant women. She was intently examining the sky. The man was bent over a table, writing. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and in a working-man's dress. A violent peal of thunder shook the house, and heavy raindrops began to patter.

"Heaven is on our side," the woman murmured; "in such bad weather, the sentinels will stay in their watch-boxes, and the regular rounds will not go out."

The man shook his head doubtfully and went on with his writing.

"Do not dishearten me, Alexandre," said the woman gently. "I know that you do not believe in the success of our projects, but still let me hope for a miracle."

"I wish for one as much as you do," responded the man; "but I have more confidence in the regular means, and this appeal to citizen Tallien will serve us better than a mad attempt at breaking jail."

"Do you really believe that will succeed?" queried Lucette, for it was she, betraying the gracefulness of the Baroness de Ravenstein by the way she rose. "Do you believe there is still any justice in France, and that those in power care to deliver the innocent?"

"I believe that is the only chance left me to see my brother again," replied Alexandre Coignard. "The walls of La Force are too high and too well guarded."

"For my part," retorted the woman, "I rely on nothing but Pierre's agility and courage. Walls! he will climb them with the rope I smuggled in to him. He will kill the sentries, if needs must, but I tell you that he will succeed in getting out."

Alexandre did not reply, but disbelief was written so plainly on his countenance that Lucette let herself fall into her chair, dispirited. The gardener took her hands in his.

"Listen to me, my dear Lucette," he said in a voice of emotion. "I do not know how to spin pretty sentences, but it is my opinion that if Pierre had any grievances against you, you have amply repaired them. When you came to me to show up the scoundrels who destroyed him, you thought of nothing but to revenge his death, and it was no fault of yours that my poor brother was caught in a trap. As for the old story, Father Loreau ought to have kept a sharper eye on you, and inasmuch as you give up playing the fine lady, I undertake to bring him back his daughter."

"I shall never go back to Langeais," said Lucette gravely. "I

have no other view in life but to save your brother and leave France when he is free. I will go to Italy or Spain and become a nun."

"Pooh, pooh! we have not come to that pinch, and there is better work for you than in the cloister. You can marry Pierre and return to live quietly in our native place, instead of dining and wining with army contracting bloodsuckers! Talking of those vermin, did I tell you that Arcandier has got off? It seems that since the 9th of Thermidor they are not particular about such offences, to say nothing of the purveyor having still enough money to blind the public prosecutor."

Lucette did not answer. Absorbed in deep reverie, she repeated slowly:

"Marry Pierre!"

At that moment the storm fell with its full violence, and complete darkness enwrapped the scene until the rapidly succeeding lightning flashes came and lit up the long white walls and tree tops. Lucette leaned on the window sill, without heed of the rain pelting her face and the wind loosening her hair.

"To think that he is there," she mused, regarding Paris with eyes that seemed to make nothing of distance and darkness.

Alexandre was reading the letter over that he had written. All of a sudden the watcher sent up a scream of terror and flung herself back.

"A man!" was her cry; "a man—there—in the garden!"

"They come to arrest us," said the gardener, springing up to close the window.

As he was bolting the shutters rapid blows shook the ground-floor back-door, and a panting voice called out:

"Let me in, brother!"

Alexandre bounded to the stairs, whilst Lucette murmured in emotion:

"'Twas well I knew I should save him!"

An instant after, Pierre Coignard staggered into the room, pale, his clothes torn, his face lacerated and his hands smeared with blood. At the first glance round he saw Lucette, and he clenched his fists wrathfully.

"What is this woman doing here?" he asked his brother. At this cutting speech the poor baroness bowed her head and fainted on the floor as if stabbed to the heart.

"Raise her up and take her hence," said the grenadier. "I have no time to waste in condoling with her. They are on my track."

"But how have you managed to escape?" interrupted the stupefied gardener.

"It's of little consequence and I am in a hurry. But since you insist upon it, here you have it briefly. Somebody sent a rope ladder and a knife in to me in a loaf of bread. I got out on the high wall of the new building, and fastened one end of the rope as best I could. It was too short by about fifteen feet, but when I got to the end I dropped, and was quit with a few bruises. But the sentry, who was in his box, heard me. He thrust his bayonet into my shoulder and bawled, 'Turn out the guard!' Luckily the night was as black as a witch's

cat, and I ran for it. I have at least three quarters of an hour's start, and by the time they come here I shall be well off again."

"Off again! wounded as you are! You are mad. I'll hide you in the hayloft, where they'll not find you, I warrant."

"I tell you I must go, and I'll give you my reasons. Only let me advise, the next time you send me a ladder for prison-breaking purposes, measure it more exactly," said the grenadier, strong enough still to smile.

"But it was not I who sent it."

"Not you, eh? who else, then?"

"She," replied Alexandre, pointing to the still unconscious woman.

"That woman! Then I have fallen into some trap."

The market gardener shook his head.

"But don't you know it was she who decoyed me into Carretti's ambush," went on Pierre furiously. "This woman's a monster. By an infernal scheme she led one brother to arrest another, and yet you would not have me distrust her!"

"I tell you that Lucette loves you and rescued you," replied Alexandre in a firm voice. Turning, the grenadier saw the young woman kneeling by the bedstead, imploring him with a look and with her clasped hands outstretched.

"Yes, I do love you, Pierre," she said, "and I am ready to die in expiation of the harm I have done you."

Coignard seemed affected.

"Why did you betray me if you loved me?" asked he, halting between his anger and the pity that glided into his heart despite himself.

"I have not betrayed you, and yet I beseech you, on my bended knees, to forgive me," supplicated Lucette.

"I do not know how to read puzzles," replied he, curtly.

"Listen to me for the sake of all you hold as dear—by that of her you love," she added with an effort.

"I will; but speak quickly, for you can cause my death by detaining me here."

"Oh, you will not understand me, Pierre," she said abruptly; "you do not know a woman's nature. It is true I wished to destroy you, because you loved another, and because you broke my heart by speaking of that love. But I repented; I braved Darius's anger, I risked my life, all to warn you of the plot laid to entangle you. Alas! I was too late."

"Was it not you, as I think, who led the soldiers who captured me to Arcandier's?" continued Coignard.

"I was told that you were dead, and I wished to take your murderers."

The grenadier pondered over all the adventures of his last days of freedom, and questioned whether the sorrowing woman who besought his pardon might be guiltless.

"She may not lie," he thought, trying to read in her eyes.

Wishful to essay a last test, he said after a silence:

"I do not wish to deceive you. I am on my way to rejoin a

woman⁴⁴ — the one whose death you vowed. If you regret having brought about my escape this night, you may yet have me arrested. In half-an-hour I shall be making my way for Brittany, so I can be easily overtaken."

"You have the right to insult me, Pierre," said Lucette, sadly; "it will be my punishment. But I thank you for having entrusted me with your project, for I may yet be useful to you. I am not under suspicion since I have informed against you. So I will tell your pursuers that you are going to Havre, and you will not be hunted on the road to Brittany. You see now how I again shall inform upon you," she added, with a bitter smile.

Pierre was overcome. He raised the unfortunate woman and clasped her hands in his.

"I believe you now, Lucette," he said with emotion, "and if I am not to see you again, my brother shall take care of you."

"That is settled already," said Alexandre. "I am going to take her to Langeais where, if old Loreau does not receive his daughter befittingly, I promise you she shall not be friendless."

"Thank you, brother; I rely upon you."

"Come, come," said the gardener seriously, "do you really think of going in your present state?"

"I must. I wonder the police have not come already."

"Can they not take you as easily out of doors? In these times, none can go far without passes."

"Don't let that trouble you, I know a trick to go a couple of hundred leagues as easily as if I carried a master-pass."

The other shook his head unconvinced.

"Have you any money, even?" he asked, pulling out a drawer.

"I have eighteen six-livre crown-pieces, three times what I require to reach the coast."

"And clothes? are you going in what you have on?"

"You can lend me a blouse, canvas overalls, and a straw hat."

"That's easy enough. Come into my room."

The alternative joy and despair through which Lucette passed had given her a false energy which suddenly fled when she was left alone.

"Why should I battle against my fate?" she asked herself; "there's nothing but death before me without him to see."

Hiding her face in her hands she wept bitterly, and was so weeping when the brothers reappeared.

Pierre was not recognisable in the rustic apparel. He softly approached Lucette and kissed her on the forehead, which made her shudder.

"Farewell," he said feelingly, "farewell, and may you be happy!"

"Are you going without forgiving me?" she inquired trembling.

"I do forgive you, Lucette, and I love you as a sister," responded the grenadier. "Come down with me, brother, and see me to the garden gate," he added in a matter-of-fact voice; "I stumbled over something there useful as my passport."

"Passport!" repeated Alexandre, doubtful that he heard aright.

"Just so! and you will be still more astonished when you see what

it is. Again, farewell," he said to Lucette, offering his hand and striding forth firmly.

The shower was over, and stars were sparkling in the heavens. The fugitive crossed the garden, leaning on his brother's arm, and stopped near a wall where there rose a stack of gardening implements.

"That's what I want," he said, pointing to a spade, a pick, and a wheelbarrow. "One more good-bye, and I am off."

"He's gone mad," muttered Alexandre, puzzled.

"I shall send you a line if I am not captured or killed," were the last words of Pierre, in his calmest voice, as, tearing himself from his brother's embrace, he put the spade and mattock in the barrow, grasped the handles, and trundled the whole before him with the slow regular tread of a day labourer going to his field-work.

XVI.

THE BUSH FIGHT.

COIGNARD's plan was most simple, and would almost infallibly succeed because of that simplicity itself. The fugitive wished at all price to reach the sea and sail for Spain. He selected the Breton coast, from the fact that the shattered fragments of the Royalist army still held out there. Their communications with the English cruisers were frequent, and Coignard reckoned on profiting by them. In other days, the republican soldier would certainly have never dreamed of going among the enemy, but nothing but his love for Rosa dwelt in his heart. He little recked if he must betray his flag in order to see the woman again to whom he had already sacrificed his fair fame. Besides, it was not his intention to take service in Spain. He wanted to see Rosa—the rest was nothing.

At that period it was very difficult to reach Brittany. It was a province almost as inaccessible as a besieged fortalice, being blockaded on one side by the republican troops, and guarded on the other by numerous bands of partisans. Public vehicles had ceased to travel the roads thither, and the few wayfarers had to be escorted by soldiery.

To cover alone the hundred leagues separating Paris from the revolted province was, therefore, among the most hazardous enterprises; to attempt it without papers in unchallengeable order was to expose oneself to being stopped at the first stage. Coignard knew this perfectly well, but he also knew that men cultivate their fields in spite of civil war. So he was bound to give himself the appearance of a countryman, in which he very well succeeded by donning his gardener brother's suit.

For the visible pretext to be upon the road he had ingeniously thought of the barrow. To walk steadily along the swarded roadside, and often take a nap in his single-wheel coach; to even go to sleep under it, plainly in sight, in the noontide heat; and at dusk to hurry on by the side roads with the barrow and other tools on his shoulders—these were the details in the plan. With his inborn quickness of

conception, the escaped prisoner from La Force foresaw all the eventualities of his risky journey.

With a view to avoid awkward encounters, he resolved to keep away from all towns, and enter into talk with nobody. With two quartern loaves stowed away under his blouse and a flask of brandy he could go on for ten days without being forced to call in at any place for provisions. In case of being questioned, he relied greatly on his mother wit, some little on his lucky star, and he might even pretend to be hard of hearing if pressed too close. As for his road, he knew that Brittany lay to the westward, and he was sure to reach the ocean by keeping towards the setting sun. That was good enough guide, for it mattered to him little whether he entered the insurgent district by the Côtes du Nord or Morbihan, so long as he escaped the home authorities. To ask his way of a peasant was to arouse suspicions, and it was a hundred times better to go a long bit astray.

Consequently, for ten or fifteen days, it was necessary to walk without speaking, sleep out of a bed, and eat rarely. But Coignard was endowed with an iron will and constitution, and he did not for one instant doubt the success of his astonishing scheme. The bayonet thrust in his shoulder was but a flesh wound, the bruises from his drop did not get worse, and, as some recompense, the week of forced repose in prison had doubled his vigour. He felt as if he had the strength and energy for two months, if needs must. Thanks to the negligence of his keepers, who busied themselves much more about political topics than their wards, Coignard's escape had been boldly executed an hour after sunset, and midnight had not more than struck when he left his brother's garden at Montreuil. He made the most of the four hours of darkness before him. The suburbs of the capital were well-known to him, and by a wide circuit he soon struck the road to Brest beyond Versailles. Daybreak found him between Saint Cyr and Trappes.

It was the middle of August, and splendid weather. He proceeded all the morning with the wheelbarrow before him, and lay down at noon on the skirt of the Rambouillet woods, where he slept for seven hours profoundly, so that he rose at nightfall fresh and ready. He ate a piece of coarse bread with a dash of brandy and water, and took the road through the forest. All day long he walked on without meeting more than two or three persons, and no one addressed him. The country seemed uninhabited, and the wanderer might have believed it deserted if he had not spied cattle around the farm-houses.

Civil war had changed one of the most fertile spots in France into a solitude, and cooped up all life in the large towns. This loneliness, however, singularly favoured the aim of the traveller with the wheelbarrow, and after this first day he could firmly anticipate success. He walked regularly—slowly by day, rapidly by night—and though he had no means of exactly reckoning the distances, he set his daily work as twelve leagues. According to this, it would take him over a week to reach the Breton boundary, unless he deviated much from the direct line, a thing very likely to happen in his singular mode of travel. As he made a circuit of a town when espied at a distance he remained absolutely ignorant where he was.

Rivers also gave him some embarrassment. He could not swim

them without danger of losing his sheltering barrow, and away from the inhabited places which he avoided bridges were scarce at that period. Sometimes, therefore, he had to go up a water-course very far to find a ford. Had he met a main stream, the difficulty would have been insurmountable, unless he dared the chances of passing through a town. But, on quitting Rambouillet woods, his good star turned him to the right, towards Mortagne and Alençon, so that he crossed the Sarthe and the Mayenne near their upper waters without over much trouble. On the ninth day, Coignard found the country sensibly changing in aspect. Uncultivated fields were surrounded by thick hedges, in which stood large trees. Sometimes the heath extended on both sides the road as far as the eye could reach. Neither human being nor habitation was visible. The grenadier felt that he was nearing his goal.

Since his start, not one mishap had marred his amazing enterprise. He had scarcely to exchange one or two good-days with passers-by, and he had eluded questions and inquiries with an almost miraculous good fortune. But he began to grow weary, and, over and above that, his stock of bread and spirits was all but exhausted. It was high time, therefore, to think of re-entering into relations with his fellow-men. The puzzle was not to fall into the hands of some municipal authority or other, and Coignard was much at a loss in his ignorance of his whereabouts. Very few in Paris knew anything about the western provinces. The grenadier had vaguely heard that armed bands showed themselves on the borders of Maine and Brittany.

This was the beginning of that guerilla war, prolonged even under the Consulate, and the name of the Chouans began to be repeated through France. It was not known then any more clearly than now whether the insurrectionists took the title from a leader named Chouan, or from the screech-owl (*chat-huant*), whose cry was their general signal.

Coignard had no definite idea of their aim or habits, or how they would receive a deserter from the republican army. He resolved, therefore, to redouble in prudence, advance with precaution, and not to give himself away without knowing to whom. Whilst on the move he examined the landscape, and became more and more convinced that he had overstepped the limit of the loyal cantons.

Brittany was not then popularised by the novelists, but Coignard recognised it by the grey sky and the huge blue granite boulders scattered among bulrushes. In spots he remarked clearings in the woods, traces of camp fires, and even scratches on the tree bark, which could not deceive a soldier. They were from bullets, and it was evident that war had been that way. Day broke—a sad, cloudy day.

Coignard slowly pushed his barrow up a narrow road winding along a dry, stony hillside. No living things were visible amid the sombre scenery. Not a bird was heard to twitter, and the west wind whistled mournfully in the gorse. The adventurer's meditation was gloomy; he kept asking himself whether he was not walking into some ambushade.

"What a droll figure I must cut," he thought, "trundling a barrow on a road where everybody has laid aside the plough-handles for the gun. Sure as I live, I am on Chouan ground. I had better drop my barrow, and apply at the first house I see. Well, when I get to the

top of this ridge, I will take a look around, and go by any church steeple I spy."

The ascent was long, and he was glad to stop and rest when upon the summit. He was at the edge of a table land entirely covered with furze, and bordered by beech trees. Enormous monoliths, covered with black moss, stood up in the verdure of the rushes. A few steps off Coignard perceived one rock higher than the others, and he pitched upon that as being fittest for an observatory. He climbed up on it and looked about on all sides. The heath extended afar, silent and deserted, but on the right a pointed roof appeared above tall trees.

"Ha!" said the grenadier, "a tower tiled in. That may be the lord's manor house. Just what I was looking for. I will go and ask the noble to enrol me in his company if he has one, or if not to send me on to the coast. I have seen enough of the best society this last month to present myself as a nobleman trying to get over to England," he added, getting ready to quit his post.

Suddenly a long-drawn, lugubrious scream rose out of the midst of the heather.

"Halloa!" exclaimed Coignard, "here's a queer country! Owls hooting in broad daylight. It is true there's not much sun out, and they may make a blunder and not be to blame."

The "to-whit to-whoo" was repeated nearer and more piteously.

"This is no joke," muttered the stranger: "I am a bait for owls now. The very reason I should not linger here. Let's be off to the castle."

At this very moment, as he was stooping to descend, a whizz, well-known to the soldier, made his ear tingle, and a detonation resounded on the open space. Instinctively the human target glided off the top of the rock; but before that, he caught sight of a small puff of white smoke slowly floating up from a clump of heather.

"The hoot seems to have been their 'Who goes there?'" remarked the grenadier. "I did not answer like a bird, and so I was fired on. It is all very natural, but it's a hot welcome into Brittany."

The situation became serious for the fugitive. The granite block shielded him from shots, but he felt that he could not remain there for ever, and that the invisible marksman would load up against his leaving cover. To abandon that bulwark was to expose himself to certain death, so he must find some way to disable this annoying sentinel. Coignard had no other weapons than spade and pick, but his mind, fertile in all kinds of inventions, suggested a stratagem.

"It is clear," he reasoned, "that this waylayer knows he missed me. He will not come out of his bush, because he believes I am armed, and he reserves his shot to pop me off like a hare when I do come forth. But, if he believed me dead, he would crawl over to tap my pockets, whereupon, with a good clip of the spade, I could shut up the screech-owl."

Without losing a minute, Coignard pulled off his hat and smock, stuffed the former out with moss to seem to contain a head, and stuck it on the end of the pick which he had dressed in the garment. He raised this improvised dummy man gently, by holding the shaft until the hat passed beyond the top of the boulder, and waited.

"At fifty paces he may pardonably take my make-believe for a man," muttered Coignard. "If he shoots, it will be another bullet wasted, and we shall see what happens after."

Several seconds elapsed ; then came a smart shock, accompanied by a metallic ring which tore the figure from his grasp, and he had the care to utter a loud shriek. The marksman had aimed well, and the bullet had hit the pick metal on the handle just where the pretended man's breast would be. Coignard stood up against the rock with the picked-up mattock lifted in both hands, and stood ready to strike. He was not kept in suspense, for the beat of a man's hasty footsteps sounded on the dry sward. The enemy came round by the right. Coignard, at the corner, supported himself firmly on his bowed legs, and shortened his arms to deliver more forcibly.

It was imperative the first blow should be mortal, as any struggle would be the grenadier's ruin. Hardly thirty seconds after the gunshot a man ran round the stone at full speed, and came face to face with Coignard. The latter's action was swift as thought. The terrible pick came down with incredible violence, and entered the chest of the ill-fated rebel, who rolled over on the bracken, literally spouting blood, and expired. In falling he dropped the gun he had in hand. To leap upon it and take off the cartridge pouch and belt was the work of an instant for the victor. The trick had amply succeeded.

Pierre was triumphant. He whistled the Marseillaise hymn as he loaded the piece, and while running the charge home, he scanned the slain man. He was a beardless youth of twenty, with long locks coming down to his shoulders. He wore wooden shoes, duck leggings, coarse cloth knee-breeches, and a sheepskin wrap. On his bosom, laid bare by the pick, lay a little medal attached to a scapulary.

"Either I do not know myself, or this lad is a Chouan," observed the grenadier, shaking his head, "and I always heard they went in flocks. The heather must contain more birds of his feather, and my account is settled. If I fire a shot I shall have my hands full. Only to think that I meant to join this party ! If this is how they receive recruits, I had better wheel about and take another road."

The gun had a bayonet, and the pouch contained twenty cartridges. "Anyhow, I can defend myself a little," went on Coignard. "The best thing for me to do now is to get into that house yonder. I can explain things better with a gentleman than with these savages. Good-bye, old barrow ! Skin your eye, Pierre, and forward, march !"

It was easier to say he would get to the château than to do it. The clumps that strewed the plain perhaps concealed many marksmen, and by coming out on the open Coignard exposed himself to be shot without any chance to reply. He deemed it the surest course to go down the hill and proceed to the dwelling by a more covered way. With the dead man's gun on his shoulder and cartridge-pouch by his side, he was just about to leap down on the pebbly road winding beneath him when he heard voices calling to one another on the heath.

"Too late !" grumbled he. "The rascals are coming to see what has become of their look-out, and if I go this way they can pick me off at leisure. I would rather be killed here, where I can bring down a brace of them."

In fact the boulder formed a capital bulwark to defend a sharp-shooter, and Coignard's martial instinct taught him the advantages of the position. But he modified his tactics.

When pitted against a single foe, he had lured him behind the rock to slay him and take his gun. Now that he possessed a firearm and had several men to fight, the best plan, on the contrary, was not to let them get near.

Behind cover a determined man is worth two or three in the open, and may offer a defence not possible in the level field. Besides, the Chouans might think Coignard not by himself and it was important to keep them deceived. He cocked the gun, made sure that the bayonet was fast screwed on the muzzle, and glided softly to the edge of the large stone. The voices came near enough for him to distinguish :

"Yvon ! halloa, Yvon ! have you knocked him over !"

"Good," said Coignard to himself. "They are calling to their sentinel and they believe me killed. Just what I wanted."

Going down on his hands and knees, he stretched out his head to see the newcomers, reasoning that they would not look down on the ground at the outset, and that he might accordingly have a few seconds' view without being noticed. He was not wrong. About thirty paces off, two men, clad like the one he had slain, were coming towards the boulder, their guns under their arm, and chatting tranquilly, without seeming to suspect they were being observed.

Without changing his position, Coignard drew his gun to him, brought it up to his shoulder, took aim and fired. The bulkier of the two spun round and pitched forward with extended arms. His mate stopped short, glared around him in affright, crossed himself, and fled at the top of his speed till out of sight in the heath.

"That makes two," said Coignard drawing back smartly and reloading.

But how many were they ?—that was the question. He listened without hearing anything but the whistling wind among the reeds. He might have believed the plain a desert. The silence was awful.

Coignard had given proofs of bravery in the short campaign of 1792 ; but this invisible danger and cold-blooded slaughter, under a cloudy sky, was a hundred times more alarming than charging a battery in the blazing sunshine, amid the roar of cannon and the intoxication of burning powder. The death impending was an obscure, unwitnessed one, without glory ; the death of a brigand shot in a nook of a wood and left to rot like a dog.

For the first time, perhaps, in the month, the ex-soldier comprehended that passion had thrown him out of the true path, and that by desertion of his colours he had doomed himself to a dishonourable end.

"I am in a nice pickle," he hissed through his closed teeth, "and I am served right. But it is a little too late to grumble over it. Pooh !" he added, snapping his fingers, "I got out of a worse scrape, and I may scramble out of this one."

Nothing stirred on the heath, and it was evident that the Chouans did not mean to show themselves.

"Have it your own way," he said to himself ; "I shall not budge either, though I have to stick here till dark. We'll see who holds out

longest. I have stood guard longer than that. I shall do, unless they outflank me," he continued, glancing round with some disquiet.

On his right the ground was open, and there was no surprise to be feared on that side. But on the other the heather grew up to the rock, and beyond it.

"If they have the sense to creep up there," resumed the soldier, "they can shoot me down like a hare in her form. Undoubtedly, the post is not safe, and I had better run the gauntlet for the houses. I have good legs, and all the bullets will not be well aimed."

He was still speaking, when two or three gunshots flew from his left. The bullets knocked splinters off the rock to graze his face, but they themselves did not hit him. He wiped his bleeding cheek, felt himself rapidly all over, to make sure he was not wounded, measured with a glance the distance to be traversed, and started off at the utmost speed for the beechwood. The ground was uneven, and strewn with stones and broken branches. He leaped over these stumbling-blocks like a deer, and was half over the clear ground when the musketry began again. He had the whole line of gorse to pass, and however swift his race nothing but a miracle would save him from death. Twenty paces from the wood he felt a dull pain in his side, as if struck with a club. He ran a few seconds longer, but his legs doubled up under him, and he fell. A bullet had gone through his thigh.

"This time I am done for," groaned the grenadier; "but I'll have another scored to my side before I get the last discharge."

Grasping his gun convulsively with the right hand, he pressed the other on his badly bleeding wound, and remained on the earth completely still. Six men jumped out of the furze, and ran straight to him. He let them come up so they could have touched him, then, rising on one knee with a mighty effort, he shot one dead with the muzzle on his bosom, and, reversing the weapon so as to hold it by the barrel, he began to use the butt as a club. But it was too unfair a struggle. In ten seconds or less the soldier received half-a-dozen bayonet wounds. His blood flowed freely, his strength failed him, and he let his gun fall.

"Ha, brigand blue-coat! ha, cursed dog!" shouted the tall peasant, who appeared to be captain of the band, "now at last I shall send you to Old Nick!"

Setting his wooden shoe on the dying man's breast, he lifted his gun to nail him to the sod. Closing his eyes, Coignard awaited death.

"Ground your arms, Jeannic!" cried an imperious voice.

The Chouan turned, and held back the thrust that would have pierced the victim's breast.

"Master Goueznou!" he muttered, lifting his hat.

The bearer of this queer name had galloped up on a native pony, without the deeply engaged guerillas having noticed him. He looked like a country gentleman in his cocked hat and cavalry boots, but his square face was vulgar and unprepossessing. He seemed in his fortieth year.

"Why have you been firing off guns around the mansion this hour or so, and who is this man?" he inquired, in a harsh, dry voice.

"Master bailiff," answered Jeannic, "this is a blue-coat, begging your honour's pardon for naming such a swine to you, and the shots you heard were his, a-killing three honest lads. Yvon and Guy, a-lying over yonder, and Cloarec that you see here."

"Is the blue-coat dead?" questioned the rider.

"He still moves, but, if you only say the word, I'll stop his moving with my bayonet; it won't take long."

"Turn out his pockets first," said the horseman quietly.

Two Chouans stooped over the soldier, who moved no more, and in less than a minute turned his pockets inside out and opened his coat.

"Nothing on him but eighteen six-livre crown pieces, and some writing," reported Jeannic, showing a large grey packet tied with a silk string to the neck of the wounded man, who growled with rage. It was Rosa's letter they took from him.

"Give it me," said the bailiff, going on to read the address. "'To M. Pierre Coignard, Grenadier of the Convention.' Very well; I suspected as much. He is a spy of the blue-coats."

"So I told you," said the Chouan, in ferocious glee. "Now I can finish him, eh, master?"

"You will lift him up on a hand-barrow, to be made with your men's muskets, and carry him to the great house. Do it gently, and try not to kill him on the road. Her ladyship, the countess, must see what he was about."

The Chouans looked at one another, far from disposed to take care of a man who had killed three comrades of theirs; but they concluded to obey, though grumblingly.

Exhausted by loss of blood, the wounded man was placed on the litter, but he swooned dead off when the carriers began to move. When he re-opened his eyes, he was stretched out on a long table in a low room, feebly lit by narrow windows. An old woman was dressing his wounds, and a Chouan, leaning on his gun in the doorway, was hatefully regarding him.

"What can be their reason for not having finished me where I fell?" he mused.

Suddenly an idea came to him which made him quiver. He had often heard that these rebels amused themselves by torturing their prisoners before dealing death, and he believed he was reserved for some atrocious torment.

"I sent three of them into the next world, and the rest are going to be even with me by roasting me at a slow fire. I wish I could die before they came for me."

He made a movement to tear away the dressing put by the old woman on his most dangerous wound.

"Tie him, Jean-Marie," said she quietly.

Standing his gun up against the door lintel, the Chouan came over with a cord drawn from his pocket and tied the captive's arms, so that, in less than a minute, the series of complicated knots put any movement out of the question.

The unfortunate grenadier ground his teeth and groaned deeply. Into his intrepid soul stole a feeling hitherto almost unknown to him: fear. The valiant soldier of the Republic, the bold jail-breaker of La

Force was frightened of torture, though not of mere death, which he had braved a hundred times. His bosom heaved irregularly, the blood rushed to his cheeks and he foamed at the mouth.

"Mother Lanic," said the Breton, "just look at the way the bluecoat is grinning. He will draw another kind of face when he will soon be grilling!"

The hag shrugged her shoulders without saying anything. The patient could no longer doubt what fate was in store for him, applying the pious peasant's presage of hell to an actual earthly torture, but he made a masterful effort to overcome his emotion and the weakening in courage only instantaneously endured. By a remarkable power of will, he so controlled bodily spasms that he remained mute and silent, awaiting death with the red Indian's stoical impassibility at the stake.

"They shall not force scream or groan from me," he vowed to himself, closing his eyes.

Not even the sound of the door opening had any effect on him. A heavy tramp and the clatter of musket stocks sounded around him without his vouchsafing any token of life.

"This is the man," said the harsh voice of the bailiff who had ordered the Chouans about when Coignard fell on the heath. "He shot three of the lads and wounded two. I should have had him killed straight off, only I thought he might furnish information. His disguise and a letter found upon him prove he is a spy."

After a silence, a feminine voice said slowly, in a tone sweet and grave:

"He is quite a young man."

"Age has nothing to do with it, my lady, and the rebels choose any agents they can find. This is a Convention grenadier, probably sent all the way from Paris by the Committee of Public Safety."

"Show me the letter," said the soft voice.

Another woman was going to read Rosa's farewell. She would violate the lovers' secret, and perhaps make a jest of it. Like a red-hot arrow this thought flew across Coignard's brain, and he opened his eyes with a yell of wrath. Two steps from the table where he lay bathed in blood a woman was standing and regarding him with amazement blended with pity. She was in a riding habit, which well set off her tall, majestic figure. A white plumed felt hat imperfectly concealed jet tresses rolling in large curls upon her shoulders, and her fine white hand held a silver-pommelled riding whip.

The grenadier could not turn his eyes from this being who evoked a memory so dear to him. By a strange hazard, the stranger's face reminded him of the enchanting Spaniard's. Her white complexion and large proud black eyes completed the illusion, and Coignard wondered if he were not the sport of a dream; but the scowling visages which foiled the beauty confirmed the reality. The four men with firelocks seemed only to await the order of execution. The captive read it in the bailiff's hard eye, as he stood behind his mistress hat in hand, and he resumed his disdainful impassibility. The stranger had not long read attentively before sharp surprise was painted on her features.

"Is this letter addressed to you?" she inquired of the corpse-like

Coignard. "Why do you refuse to answer me?" she continued, approaching to lay her hand on the wounded man's arm, which made him shudder.

"The letter is mine, but how does that concern you," he replied sullenly.

"I am eager to know how the man can become a spy who can be so loved."

The prisoner writhed in his bonds and his eyes flashed anger.

"Hearken to me," proceeded the unnamed lady. "Civil war is a merciless one. I am a woman, yet those who sent you would kill me on the scaffold if they seized me. What penalty does that soldier of the Republic incur who sneaks into this country in disguise, instead of fighting the general enemy on the frontier?"

"Death!" returned Coignard excitedly. "I am ready. Why do you delay in shooting me!"

"You are fearless," resumed the lady after a pause. "A spy is never brave," she added; then as if speaking to herself, she added, "and never could be loved."

The wounded man turned ghastly pale, and was so weak that a tear escaped from his eyelids, touched as he was to the heart by the countess's speech.

"What has brought you into Brittany?" she questioned gently.

"I was going through to a foreign land."

"To serve against your party?"

"I belong to no party and meant to serve nobody."

The lady's large expressive eyes were striving to read the bottom of his soul.

"Ah, I understand," she said abruptly; "you were going to meet the object of your affection."

"'Tis true," breathed the grenadier.

"Where is she?"

"In Spain."

"The British cruiser has left the coast; you would have found no vessel to take you hence."

"That matters nothing, since I am doomed," he said bitterly.

"This fellow is lying," said the bailiff in an undertone; "and the letter he carries is only some trick of the police."

"That will do, Goueznou," interrupted the countess. Laying her hand on the captive's shoulder, she said in measured accents: "You must know that your life belongs to me. If you are willing to serve the king with us I will pardon you, and I will pledge you my word as a nobly born lady that in a year you may sail away for Spain."

"I accept," replied the grenadier, his eyes shining at the prospect of seeing Rosa Marcen.

"Unbind this soldier and carry him into the Red Room," the countess said with a haughty look upon the Chouans, chafing at being deprived of their revenge.

"I ought to have let them shoot him on the heath," growled the bailiff, flushed with fury. "But he shall not gain much by the reprieve," he added under his breath, whilst the countess spoke with the old woman who had attended to Coignard's wounds,

XVII.

THE COUNTESS DE LOUVIGNÉ.

YOLANDE DE PORNIC had been wedded at the age of sixteen to the Count of Louvigné, who was three times as old, and whom she hardly had seen before the espousal.

Her childhood had been spent on the Morbihan strand, where her father, Baron de Pornic, a great hunter and fisher, had accustomed her, at an early age, to all kind of rough sports. Never having had a son, the old nobleman consoled himself by making a tomboy of his daughter, whom he scarcely thought otherwise to educate. The priest of the town had undertaken to educate Yolande in a little grammar and history, along with the catechism, but he had all his work to get any of it into her brain.

His pupil was rebellious to all constraint, and, like a sapling which springs back to its former position when the bending hand is withdrawn, the young Breton girl submitted to the lessons without losing any of her wild instincts. She would listen to the venerable pastor with a respectfulness much like resignation, but, after she had written down from an hour's dictation some chapter of the Gospel, she would fly to the stables, saddle a little Oussand pony, and gallop over the heath with her hair and the pony's mane flying.

At twelve, she was so good a horsewoman she could clear a five-foot hurdle, kill a partridge on the wing, and fire a pistol better than her father. On the other hand, she only read with difficulty, and showed no taste whatever for any science.

Moreover, she remained a stranger to society manners, for the baron, left a widower early, had ceased to have anything to do with his neighbours.

When the Count de Louvigné came to ask Yolande's hand in wedlock, she had not the faintest notion how a young lady of good family should dress, talk, or bear herself. Yet she was a delightful creature, and though the sea air had darkened her complexion, her finely cut features and aristocratic face revealed a pure strain. Notwithstanding her abrupt movements and old-fashioned garments, nobody ever mistook her for a commoner, and her suitor easily perceived what a bewitching woman was hidden in the coarse husk, as the lapidary recognizes the worth of an uncut diamond.

The Count de Louvigné had lived mostly at the Court at Versailles, and had come to live on his estate after gambling losses which had deeply impaired his fortune. A noble by birth and bearing, he felt at first very lonesome in his old manor house in the woods, and he promptly came to the conclusion that a wealthy marriage should help him out of it.

Yolande de Pornic, as an only daughter, ought to inherit a considerable domain which the old baron her father improved every year, and, as far as rank went, it was a most suitable alliance.

The union was decided upon at the close of a hunt, during which the count had charmed his future father-in-law by his knowledge of woodcraft, and Yolande, ignorant of life, accepted it without distaste. The awakening was cruel to the young girl.

Prematurely aged, exhausted in merrymaking, and wholly engaged in maintaining his rank and repairing his estate, her husband offered nothing to please her simple and ardent character.

When she was shut up in the dull Château de Louvigné, far from the sea which had sung the lullaby of her infancy, she was aware too late that she had been sacrificed, and she cursed her innocence.

The mad gallops over the sandy hills were replaced by solemn calls on the neighbouring dowagers in the old family coach, and the serious duties of a *châtelaine* absorbed every moment of the once wild girl of Morbihan. Her only distraction was to visit the farms and help the poor.

She was soon known and adored throughout the district, and her increasing popularity vexed her husband.

"If the king ever needed an army of clowns," he would say sometimes, "you would certainly be charged, my dear Yolande, to raise and command one."

Under all circumstances, her lord preserved the haughty manners of a courtier, and never spoke to his vassals but to issue orders or command services. Hence he was detested as much as his countess was worshipped, and the hate he inspired was doubled by what was bestowed on his bailiff, one Goueznou, a base-born upstart, who pitilessly executed his master's wishes.

The time was not far off when the king would need an army of clowns.

The Revolution of 1788 broke out, and the count, appointed deputy of his class to the *Etats-généraux*, had to go to Paris, leaving his young wife behind. Free and happy in her loneliness, Yolande shared her time between her father in his house in Morbihan, and her tenants of Louvigné, who loved and respected her as a saint. The count wrote her rarely, and his letters were short and dry. In the spring of 1791 he announced that he must go with the fugitive princes to Coblenz, and would only return into France when the troubles were over. He advised her not to leave the estate, and manage it with the bailiff Goueznou. This fellow's servile manners disgusted the countess, but he was zealous and sharpwitted, and she conformed with her husband's wishes.

The dreadful year of 1792 commenced in the west with the Vendée outbreak, which rapidly spread over all Brittany.

The old Baron de Pornic hastened to his daughter, and took the head of a body of rebels raised around the manor house. The peasants enthusiastically enrolled themselves at the call of their good lady, as they styled her, and she mounted horse beside her father to bring General Lescure three hundred men, armed and equipped at their expense. During six months, the young noblewoman shared the Vendéans' dangers and fatigues, without remembering her sex, her beauty, and her rank. She fought like a common soldier, and contented herself with coarse bread, joyful at gratifying her natural craving for action.

and change. She warred as she would have loved, with all the fury of her free, proud, and unaffected youth.

When she returned to Louvigné in the midst of the winter of 1792, after a hundred escapes from death, Yolande was alone in the world, her father having been slain in the rout of Savenay, and no letters having come from the count these two years.

She continued to dwell on her own land without being out of ease. Though much reduced by warfare, her little force sufficed to protect her, and her château was always militarily guarded in readiness for the revival of the insurrection. It was into the thick of an ambuscade of the countess's faithful Bretons that chance guided Pierre Coignard, and it needed but very little more for him to have abruptly terminated his adventurous career on Louvigné heath.

On seeing the prisoner, Yolande had been singularly impressed. From infancy she had been taught to curse the enemies of the king; her father had fallen under the republican soldiers' bullets, and yet this "bluecoat" had not excited any feeling of hatred in her heart. This wounded youth was so brave that he inspired sympathetic pity, and Rosa's letter had revolutionized her mind. Her burning lines and the vows of eternal love had opened undreamt-of horizons to the young noblewoman.

"And this is love," she thought, profoundly perturbed by passion's language, which she had never heard and never even imagined. It seemed to her a crime to let this man die, though he was a traitor covered with royalists' blood, and the grenadier might even have refused to serve the king without fear of being shot.

Pierre Coignard was one of those men who exercise an influence over womankind, which scientific authorities try to explain as arising from the magnetic fluid. He charmed them without endeavouring to please them, and the Countess de Louvigné suffered the singular fascination before she thought of defending herself.

On the morrow of the day when death had stood so close by him, the grenadier awoke from a feverish sleep to see Countess Yolande by his bedside, and he wondered if he were not in a dream. He recalled but confusedly the recent events; it seemed to him that a woman had saved his life and that he had made some pledge, but he did not yet understand why the soldier of the Republic had been spared.

"What have I promised her?" he questioned himself, seeking to read in her eyes.

"He's thinking of the woman he loves," the countess mused.

"I thank you, lady," said Coignard at last to break an embarrassing silence; "you might have had me shot, but you have shown me the attention given to officers. I do not know how to make a return."

"You owe me nothing since you belong to my party," answered Yolande softly.

He stared in astonishment.

"Have you forgotten that you engaged to serve the king for a year?" she queried.

"Oh!" muttered the grenadier, "that's how I got off! it seems that I have denied the Republic. It is you whom I wish to serve,

lady," said he warmly; "I do not know anything about kings. I am only a soldier and do not study politics. But I love those who are good to me, and I am ready to die for them."

The countess lowered her eyes, for the ringing voice roused novel sensations within her.

"It is for me alone that he gives up his flag," she thought. "Tell me your story," she added aloud, almost timidly.

"It is short and plain, lady. At eighteen I joined the army, and went through the campaign of '92 against the Prussians. Afterwards I was entered in the Convention grenadiers, but mounting guard disgusted me, and I left——"

"To go and meet the woman you love?" quickly interrupted Yolande.

"How do you know that?" cried the astonished Coignard.

She held up Rosa's letter in a trembling hand. "This is yours, sir. Take it back again," she said, colouring up.

The grenadier began to see clear, and two opposite feelings divided him. His love for Rosa was cherished in the depths of his heart, but yet the new existence of glory and danger offered irresistible attraction to his fickle fancy. To carry on irregular warfare beside the young beauty who had saved his life, who loved him perchance, this was the most winning prospect ever offered the adventurous soldier. It was little he cared for the Republic, and he even more imagined that serving the fallen but rising cause would better advance him.

"One year," he thought. "She says that I shall be free in a year to sail for Spain, and that I may have plenty of life whilst awaiting my release. Why should I not?"

Besides, he had no choice in the matter, impossible as it was for him to leave a country where at every stride he would step into a pit-fall. He made up his mind instantly. Before Yolande could oppose him, he snatched up her hand offering the letter, brought it to his lips and laid a kiss on it which made her shiver from top to toe.

"I belong to you, madame," he said passionately, "and I shall serve you unto death!"

That hour decided the fate of Yolande de Louvigné.

XVIII.

OUT OF THE DEAD PAST.

In the middle of the first year of the nineteenth century, on a fine July evening, over that same heath of Louvigné where its countess had saved Pierre Coignard's life six years before, a young lady was riding an English horse at a walking pace. She seemed absent, whilst a handsome horseman beside her was making his pony caper among the furze bushes with playful pricks of the spur.

The sky was of perfect purity and the sun was disappearing behind the tall beeches. The lady seemed to admire the calm, grand landscape, and her eyes vaguely wandered on the forest outskirts, dyed golden and purple by the sunset rays. The gambols of the pony, no doubt, broke up her brown study, for she turned on her riding com-

panion and said testily : " What ails you, my dear, and makes you tease poor Ralph so much ? " The gentleman curled his lips disdainfully, and answered with somewhat overdone politeness :

" Since you wish it, I'll rein him in to a walk ; but you are robbing me of my only amusement. Since the end of the campaign, I have not had three gallops, 'pon my word ! "

" Getting tired of this kind of life ? " queried the other with some bitterness.

" I hope you will not think so," replied he ; " but I own that I do regret there's no fighting going on. When a fellow's had it every day for five years, it takes time to get used to idleness."

" Yet I was looking forward, Pierre," said the countess, for it was she, " to spend long, calm days of happiness among the brave fellows who have spilt their blood for us. It is so sweet to know that they love us."

" Love you, my dear Yolande. They fear me and respect me ; but there's precious little love. Yet it is natural enough. I am not a Breton, and I am not a nobleman, though I have served the king."

" Though you were not born a nobleman," said Yolande, blushing a little, " the king will certainly ennoble you when he returns to France."

" Maybe so ; but I do not believe he is on the verge of coming, and I doubt the First Consul will do much for an old grenadier of the Convention who fought against the Republic."

" What do you care for the First Consul ? " returned the lady. " I do not suppose you intend asking service under him ? "

" Certainly not ; but now that the treaty of peace is signed, we must reckon with him. By the same token, were you not ordered to house the company that's coming here to-morrow ? "

" Why should I not ? I have no repugnance to welcoming brave soldiers, to whatever party they belong."

" I understand that easily, my dear ; but you must allow me to keep aloof."

The countess looked at him astonished.

" I should stand in too thorny a position," went on Pierre, with hesitation, " I am not your husband, Yolande, and I fear I should be regarded as your steward."

She turned pale suddenly, and large tears rolled out of her eyes ; whilst her emotion was so sharp that she leaned on the saddle pommel a moment so as not to fall. She remained some time without speaking.

" Listen to me, Pierre," she said in a voice shaken with agitated feelings ; " if I were a free woman, you should be my husband before man as you are under heaven, and I bless the lately concluded peace, because it will allow me at last to prove the death of the count legally."

" Are you quite sure he is dead ? " inquired Coignard.

" My dear, you know he has never written since the exodus, and that noblemen returning from Condé's army reported he had been mortally wounded in the battle of Biberach."

" Do you remember the day, Yolande, when I dropped as dead on this very spot ? " asked Pierre, pointing to a moss-grown rock. " Whoever saw me stretched on the heath bleeding at every pore might

reasonably go away and report in the same manner that I was dead. Yet here I am alive, and glad of it indeed," he concluded, kissing her hand affectionately.

She blushed, and rose erect in her saddle, proud and beaming.

"What a beautiful evening," she exclaimed, gazing at the splendid sunset.

"Sent for lovers," said Pierre, placing his arm round her waist; and, yielding to his clasp, she let her head repose on the shoulder of her beloved.

It was one of the infrequent instants when two hearts beat as one, when the past is wafted away like a dream, and when the endless vistas of the future are illumined by the golden lamps of hope. Yolande gave way to the delight of being enabled to love without remorse, and Pierre forgot the regrets and disquietude blighting his happiness.

The six years passed by the former Convention grenadier in Brittany had been crowded with remarkable adventures. Wildly loved by Countess Yolande, Pierre had followed the war beside her till, by dint of bravery, he had been accepted, without demur, by the Breton leaders, who had at first shown him distrust. At Quiberon he had fought like a lion, and had miraculously saved Yolande and her detachment.

Amid the disorder of war, his connection with her had seemed less shocking, and many were inclined to forgive the woman because of her husband's long neglect. Besides, with his natural adaptability and assimilation, Coignard had become a gentleman in manners and language, so that he seemed never out of place in his new circle. Brother officers, who had lived in the Court of Versailles, marvelled where this son of nobody had picked up his excellent style, and forgave the countess her justifiable stooping to love.

"She will marry him as soon as his majesty grants him patents of nobility," said many.

This was a brilliant dream for the Touraine peasant, the escaped prisoner of La Force, and yet the fair countess's gallant was not happy.

Through all the joys and dangers, amid the love and glory of this life, Pierre thought of Rosa Marcen. In six years he had not received a line, not a word, to assure him that the Spaniard had not forgotten him. The insurrection had severed all communication with Paris, and Coignard had not been able to send his brother any news. No doubt he was believed to be dead. And still the foreigner's image was treasured in his soul, and kept between him and the countess.

At this very moment, when Yolande wholly enjoyed what she believed a mutual flame, Pierre was beholding anew with the mind's eye that hut on the Ile des Cygnes where Rosa had exchanged a pledge of everlasting love with him. Gradually he withdrew his arm from around the countess's waist, and, whilst she sought to puzzle out the meaning in his eyes, he brooded deeply on the prospect of the peace unbarring the way to Spain.

All of a sudden the heather stirred and the disagreeable face of the bailiff Goueznou appeared a few steps from the pair.

"This spoil-sport is always turning up," growled Coignard, impatiently.

"Why does he come after me here?" wondered the lady, struck with a gloomy presentiment.

Master Goueznou crept up, hat in hand, with his face shining with a peculiar evil glee. He bowed respectfully to his mistress, and said, in a voice which he endeavoured to make calm:

"Good news, my lady! My lord the count has just arrived at home."

Yolande turned deadly pale, and lost the power of speech. A thunderbolt falling at her feet could not have affected her worse. Coignard, on his part, had scowled, but he recovered countenance, and found coolness enough to say:

"You ought to have told the happy news less abruptly to the countess. Joy may kill, Master Goueznou."

A false smile flitted on the bailiff's lips.

"Well, how did the count come?" continued Pierre, "the roads are not clear yet."

"My lord," returned Goueznou, with stress on the title, "came from Paris on horseback, profiting by the escort of the regiment due here to-morrow."

"I see. Now run on to the château and herald her ladyship's return."

The bailiff went away, darting on him a spiteful glance.

"Here's an unexpected sequel, my darling," said Coignard. "What do you intend to do?"

"Kill myself!" answered the lady, after a pause.

"Why kill yourself? Would it not be better for us to go away together?"

Yolande reflected, the agitation of her features betraying the conflict within. Finally she gave Coignard her hand, and answered excitedly:

"Be it so; let us be off together. Promise me you will never leave me."

In his heart the grenadier blessed an event which would allow him to return to Paris and get news of Rosa; but there was room for gratitude in his ambitious soul, and he would certainly rather have killed himself than abandoned the countess. He gave her the pledge, and Yolande galloped towards home.

The count was waiting on the doorstep. He did not appear to have aged, though he had preserved the old style of powder and dress. He looked as calm and elegant as though he had merely been to a neighbour's over night. He greeted Yolande with the tenderly polite formality always shown her, and not a shade of suspicion dulled his fresh and reposeful countenance.

"He knows nothing," thought the countess, almost set at ease by so little expected a reception.

Coignard presented himself next, and was met with faultless courtesy.

"Who is this gentleman, my dear?" inquired the nobleman.

"One of our best officers, Pierre Coignard, whose bravery has earned him letters of nobility a dozen times over," responded the countess, still trying to mask her agitation.

"They will be all the better placed from nature having bestowed on the gentleman all the external qualities," returned the count, gravely polite enough, although the ex-grenadier fancied there was some irony.

He bowed by way of thanks, but could not help blushing when the noble continued;

"I believe the gentleman does us the honour to dwell under our roof?"

"M. Coignard is a stranger to Brittany," the lady hastened to respond, "and so I believed I was furthering the royal cause by offering a hospitality——"

"By which I shall not profit long, my lord," interrupted the adventurer. "I have just signed the laying down of arms, and am going back to Paris where my kinsfolk dwell."

"I regret the loss, sir," replied the count, "but I can well understand that you are eager to see Paris again, where you can have left none but agreeable memories."

After this brief dialogue in an underhanded tone which could but disturb the clear-sighted soldier, the lord remained alone with his lady so as to acquaint her in a few words with what had filled up the eight years of his exile. Badly wounded during the campaign of 1795, on the Rhine, he had been carried into a petty town, in the depths of Germany, where he had lived obscurely, without ability to send news to Brittany. Recently he had profited by old ties with the Beauharnais family into which the First Consul had married, to obtain his name being struck off the list of outlaws, and he returned in consequence to Louvigné in order to attend to his property without having aught to do with politics. He terminated his narration with such affectionate speech that his listener quitted him completely encouraged.

"Oh, I was forgetting, my dear," he said, kissing her paternally on the forehead, "that I shall have to cause you a great bother at the outset. I asked to dinner to-morrow the officers of the regiment that escorted me down from Paris. I am only a day ahead of them. They are honest soldiers unaccustomed to rose water and finger-glasses, and they will not greatly entertain you, dear, but we must put on a smiling face. By the way, I will present to them M. Coignard, who is also a brave fellow, and he will help us do the honours. Excuse me now, my dearest Yolande, if I ask your leave for going to my room in the left wing. Goueznou assures me that I will find no change in the house."

He bowed to the countess, who went her way thoughtfully.

"How shall I flee with Pierre," murmured she; "we must be away from here before to-morrow night!"

XIX.

THE CATASTROPHE.

ABOUT twelve o'clock next day, the Château de Louvigné and the vast avenues round about it presented a most unaccustomed aspect. At the foot of the great beeches, the republican soldiers, seated around huge earthen pots, were merrily cutting up fat fowls and quarters of mutton. Two or three barrels, a-broach in the farmyard, supplied cider in abundance for washing down the feast.

The veteran Chouans, still preserving their hatred of the blue-coats, scowled on their master's generosity, though the lads and lasses, charmed with the troopers' jollity, willingly took part in the merry-making.

This regiment, going to garrison Rennes, was fresh from Italy. The news of the battle of Marengo had reached Brittany, and the peasants greedily listened to accounts of the marvellous campaign. It was a curious sight—the long-locked louts in the national sheepskin, clustering round the jovial grenadiers of the Republic to hear about their exploits, under trees still scarred with the bullets of civil war. Quite as singular a spectacle was offered by the dining-hall of the old manor house, where a score of officers of all ranks, in the glorious uniform of the army of Italy, sat around the board covered with the old family plate. Facing one another, the count and the countess did the honours.

Pierre Coignard had found a seat at one end between two young captains, and Master Goueznou stirred up the servants who seemed to have forgotten their duties, having been bush-fighting these seven years.

Yolande had not been able to see her paramour alone since the count's return; an interview was too risky, but she had bidden a boy who was devoted to her, to saddle a couple of horses without a word to anybody, and lead them out on the heath at dark.

On entering the banqueting-room she found time to whisper to Pierre:

“At ten—in the oak avenue—be ready.”

He had also made his arrangements for the journey, much less at ease than the woman, and inspired with no confidence by the count's refined politeness. Granting even that his ignorance was genuine, it could not last long. Yolande's infatuation had had too great a notoriety in the army and on the country-side not to reach the count's ears ultimately, and it were wise not to stay for his revenge. Moreover Coignard reasoned that Master Goueznou, who detested him, would inform his master; and the more he examined the field the more suspicious the count's kindnesses seemed.

“He is much too polite to a baseborn mushroom like me,” he said to himself, “and his flowers of speech hide a trap. If Yolande had been sensible we would have been off by this.”

But he knew how to conceal his apprehension, and nobody noticed it at the dinner which began to get livelier. The count showed his guests the utmost courtesy and a quite military heartiness, and the republican officers were well disposed to forget their prejudices against the returned exiles. More reserved, the countess was rather coldly polite to her neighbour, an old commandant of martial mien, but her beauty charmed him, and the old war-horse evinced much partiality for her.

Thanks to the excellent wine, the repast, beginning a trifle ceremoniously, gradually reached that desirable period when the conversation becomes general and familiar. It turned upon everything, war, politics, love-making—the host as a courtier and fine speechifier taking the lead with marked superiority.

“What do you think of this Bordeaux wine, commandant?” he queried of his lady's neighbour. “The old Marshal de Richelieu sent it me over from Guyana in 1787, a year before his death.”

“I think, my lord, that it's much too good for an old soldier who has swallowed more ditch-water than wine in his campaigns. We

ought to have our commissary here, a good judge of liquor, who would appreciate it better than I."

"Your commissary asked to be excused," said the host quietly. "He had to go and draw stores on the Fougère road, but he promised to be in for dessert. I am desirous of your own opinion. Perhaps you sigh for your Italian wines?"

"We never had time to taste them. Our campaign lasted only a month, for we were marched back to Paris after Marengo."

"What a pity! Did you get no time to tell us what the Italian beauties are like, gentlemen?" exclaimed the count gaily.

"To speak the truth, my lord," rejoined one of the young captains flanking Coignard, "we did not go near them. Italian husbands are jealous as tigers, and woefully free with the stiletto."

"Pooh! I am not going to think that the chance of a dagger-stroke prevents a French officer from calling on his chosen one, or else they have much degenerated. In my time, it is true, the Italians invented very select vengeance."

"Have you lived there?" inquired an officer curiously.

"Travelled there considerably, at all events. I am reminded of a singular family story, a drama which I saw in Tuscany."

There was a hush to listen. The countess felt faintly apprehensive.

"It happened in a castle up in the Apennines. I was recommended to the lord of the fief by a mutual friend in Florence. I was going to Rome, and I spent three days there. I just noticed that the marchioness of—never mind names, though—showed a marked fondness for a handsome young cavalier, of good address, who seemed to be a gentleman groom, or something of that kind, in the household. But my host did not seem to see it, and I had no inclination to point it out. The young couple interested me because the marquis was old, worn out, and little likely to delight his young mate. His easy-going ways, however, completely tranquillised me on the danger the happy pair might be running. Well, on the day of my departure I was quite surprised to find I came to dine alone with the old nobleman. He excused his wife as indisposed, and the squire as being out a-hunting. I left the castle. At two leagues off, on the Viterbo road, I met a most unexpected party; the pretty page, pitifully manacled and fettered, driven along by three carbineers, who did not spare him thumps with the butts of their muskets."

There was a silence of general astonishment for a moment, which the old commandant was first to break.

"It appears that that's a country where the soldiery are at the orders of injured husbands," he commented.

"Oh, dear no, my dear commandant; not more than in France. But the marquis had set some inquiries afloat and learnt that the marchioness's favourite was a felon escaped from the Neapolitan galleys, and he had simply had his rival marched back to his cell."

"What about the lady?" inquired a captain.

"Oh, the marchioness? I believe she went into a convent, unless she imbibed a few drops of *aqua tofana*, a popular poison in that region of love intrigues."

This strange tale had thrown a gloom over the gathering, and a chill into Coignard's veins.

"He knows everything," he thought. "This wretch Goueznou is his ferret. But where the devil could he have got his clue?"

The unfortunate Yolande did not understand yet, but the count's language, full of allusions inexplicable to her, caused her deadly pangs. Wishful to cheer up the company, the honest commandant proposed the health of the First Consul.

"Very willingly," answered the host, "only I should like you to wait another moment for another guest who will be overjoyed to join us in your toast. Ay, our war-commissary! I hear the horses and jingling swords in the court-yard, and I think it is he arriving with his escort."

Indeed, the door opened almost instantly, and bailiff Goueznou, as steward, announced in a clear voice :

"Monsieur le Commissaire des Guerres Arcandier?"

The ex-contractor to the Republic, transformed into a special quartermaster, and arrayed in a fine embroidered uniform, made his pompous entrance into the dining-hall, to the applause of the officers, glad to have a boon companion the more.

Arcandier had not changed physically, being still short, thick, and rosy gilled; but his manners had acquired a dignity which suited his new rank. He respectfully saluted the count, who greeted him with a familiarity which seemed to indicate they were no strangers.

The countess regarded the vulgar stranger with scornful indifference, but Pierre Coignard, whatever his usual coolness, could not master all his emotion. Arcandier's entrance was like that of Banquo's ghost, and he wondered with dread by what fatal coincidence the man he had robbed in 1794 came again in his path. That the former purveyor had perceived him he could not doubt, for Arcandier's bottle eyes seemed to avoid meeting his; yet Coignard deluded himself at first with the belief that the new-comer, for his own personal reasons, did not want to recognise him. The recollection of the burglary in Thermidor might well be no agreeable one to Arcandier, who had, in consequence, been cast into prison as a law-breaker, and Coignard had no eagerness to touch the scar.

Nevertheless, he could not prevent feeling a lively disquiet in recalling the count's singular anecdote, in which it was difficult not to see some threatening sting. Come what might, the soldier of fortune, long habituated to extreme situations, collected his courage and coolness like a soldier ordered through a dangerous pass, but it was not without regretting bitterly that Yolande had deferred their flight.

"You arrive in the very nick of time, my dear Arcandier," said the count, "to drink to the First Consul's health. For my part, though I have always served the king faithfully, I drink with all my heart to the great man who has pacified this country, and restored me my estates," he added, smiling. "It is a good thing to enjoy your own after ten years' exile."

"I comprehend your lordship's enjoyment the better now that I see her ladyship," observed the commissary, with pretentious gallantry.

"You remind me, dear fellow, that I omitted to present you," resumed the nobleman. "Yolande, this is Monsieur d'Arcandier, commissaire des guerres, who lent his good offices to have my name erased from the list of outlaws."

The countess nodded coldly, whilst the military purveyor swelled with pride on hearing a nobleman honour him with the "de," which attributed a lofty origin to him.

"I need not introduce you to these gentlemen who came down from the capital with us," went on the host, "but here is another military officer whose acquaintance you will be glad to make, Monsieur Pierre Coignard, who has served the king in Brittany these six years, and who, to my regret, is going back to Paris."

At the name, Arcandier had started in well-feigned surprise.

"Is this some relation of one Coignard who served in the Convention grenadiers?" asked he, with calculated slowness. "No, I cannot be in error," he went on, with pretended deep astonishment, "this is the very man!"

Despite his incredible self-command, the unfortunate lover of the Countess de Louvigné could not help turning pale under this sordid eye. He wished to rise but excess of feelings nailed him to his seat; he attempted to speak, but the sentence prepared stuck in his throat.

"What is the meaning of this?" questioned the count off-handedly.

"Are you previous acquaintances? What a lucky meeting!"

The exasperated Coignard determined to get out of the corner by boldness.

"It is really the man, Monsieur Arcandier," he replied, looking the badger in the eyes. "I see that you have not forgotten our evenings in the Rue Guénégaud at the Baroness de Ravenstein's."

Disconcerted by this imperturbability, the commissary was silenced, till a rapid glance from the nobleman fired the gun again.

"I deeply regret," he said, pretending sorrow, "to vex a merry party, and above all to act so before a lady, but I have formal orders which I am compelled to execute."

"Make no to-do here, my dear commissary. It is quite natural," said the count, in a perfectly unruffled voice, "none of us assuredly are going to oppose you doing your duty. But what is it all about? You alarm us, and I am eager to tranquillise her ladyship whom your solemn airs have excited."

"My lord," returned Arcandier, pompously, "when the War Minister entrusted me with the task to organise the military administration in Brittany, he also charged me to look after several deserters reported as in hiding hereabouts, and at the head of the list is the name of Pierre Coignard."

A murmur circulated among the guests, and all eyes turned to the ex-grenadier who held his head straight, over-excited as he was, as if defying all accusations. Yolande had become deadlly pale.

"The deuce! what you say is serious," remarked the count. "The laws are stringent on deserters, the death penalty, I believe——"

The countess could not restrain an exclamation of terror.

"Oh, the case is not so bad as all that," said Arcandier in a soothing voice. "Pierre Coignard was in the army, true enough, but

when he went into Brittany about the month of Thermidor, in the second year of the Republic, the Convention grenadiers were dissolved, so that he cannot be regarded as a deserter."

"Ah, now you relieve me, my dear Arcandier," said the count, "for I must confess to you that I felt a rare interest in Captain Coignard for having fought like a lion in our cause, and even more for having saved my countess's life, as I have heard."

The military commissioner assumed a distressed mien, and cast down his eyes without speaking.

"Speak out, hang it all! my dear commissary," proceeded the count, "anybody would believe you had dreadful tidings for us. Come, come, Captain Coignard is not a deserter, you say, and as it is not likely he has cut anybody's throat, your orders cannot concern him. Never mind your special orders, but sit down and have a glass with him."

But Arcandier remained on his legs and said, with an attempt to assume the sadly stern countenance of a judge repeating the death sentence:

"Pierre Coignard is not looked after as a deserter, but as one accused of burglary."

At this accusation, made in a monotonous voice, all the guests shrank back, and Coignard's immediate neighbours drew away instinctively from him altogether. It was a home thrust this time, and the unfortunate man, white and chapfallen, bowed his head with shame, and besought some sudden death to dash him from this horrible torture of blushing under the eyes of his beloved. So long as he could delude himself that he would be accused merely of a political misdeed, he had borne up manfully, but infamy he had not the courage to support. Thief! this awful word boomed in his ears like a funeral knell, and it seemed to him that his dead honour was being carried by to be buried.

Trembling and livid, the countess eyed him bewildered, convulsively held out her hands to him, and faltered:

"No, no! this is not true! clear yourself. Pierre, clear yourself!"

From the end of the hall, Goueznou viewed the scene with sinister delight upon his angular features. The count, however, made no stir, and his visage lost not a whit of its habitual serenity.

"A proscribed refugee found my house an inviolable shelter," he said, "and I would have died to shield him, but inasmuch as this is a thief I am freed from my duty as a host, and you can arrest the criminal named Pierre Coignard."

Arcandier bowed, backed to the door and called. Almost instantly was heard the heavy tread of soldiers coming up.

"I took care to have a guard ready," he observed.

Coignard had caught up a knife off the board, and was preparing to sell his life dearly, when a terrible shriek made him turn his head. It was from the countess, maddened with grief and shame, who precipitated herself out of the open window. The sound of the splash in the deep ditch came up, and that was all. In came the soldiers. Coignard turned the knife on himself and stabbed himself twice by the heart.

"Take the scoundrel hence," said the count without emotion, "whilst we, gentlemen, see what we can do for the countess. You were

too hasty, Arcandier, and should have spared an excitable woman so affecting a scene."

He walked forth with a speed that was belied by the ferocious rapture beaming on his face, whilst the soldiers raised Coignard lifeless. When the countess was drawn out of the moat, she was dead. The old commandant, with damp eyes, pulled at his grizzled moustache as he contemplated her.

"The drum-major of ours, who threshes his wife like corn," hissed he between his teeth, "has more feeling than this mealy-mouthed returned runaway who has killed his wife without touching her. But, after all, why did she go and crimp a grenadier of the Republic!"

This is all the funeral ovation poor Yolande received.

XX.

THE LOWEST DEPTHS.

YET again Pierre Coignard was unfortunate enough not to die of his wounds, and, when he came to himself, after long days of weakness and delirium, his first glance met the bars of a prison. Carried away in a dying state from Château de Louvigné, he was caged at Rennes until he could be transferred to Paris. It was a frightful awakening, and only on that day did our hero measure the whole depth of his fall.

Of the brave officer of the Army of Faith, the enviable gallant of a noble dame, nothing was left but a wretch chained down on a dungeon's straw, and, by the rough treatment of the warder, he knew that his brilliant prospects were quenched. He was merely a vulgar rogue. In his bitter ponderings, the captive asked himself for the first time these six years if he had not followed the wrong course.

Carried away in the current of passions, he had let all life's hazards turn him so that one day he had been dashed against crime; and it was only the reflux of fortune that had swept him into a glorious career from this blasting past. Amid these prodigious alternatives of happiness and the reverse, he had never found time to meditate. He acted and he loved without even selecting the road to follow.

Loving Rose Marcen, that love had driven him to theft; loving Yolande, he had deserted his flag to dwell by her. The dread of dishonour had never made him waver for a moment. Now his eyes were opened to the fact that there is a limit to the deeds of life which a man ought not to cross. The shrinking away of the two officers, his neighbours at the count's table, had been a revelation. On hearing him accused of burglary, they had moved away instinctively, as though to mark the chasm that separated them henceforward from such as he.

All was over. Pierre Coignard was a felon. Not having been tried and convicted, the penal servitude was yet far off, but the moral sentence was delivered. Nothing could redeem him who was a criminal in his own eyes. In a timorous spirit, this painful conviction would have fostered repentance, but in Coignard's it only fed an implacable revenge. From his days in Rennes gaol his complete depravation was dated. The society which repulsed him appeared as an enemy whom he wished to overcome and hold subdued by all possible means.

"Had I murdered Arcandier when I was robbing him in the year II," he had the audacity to argue, "he would not have recognised me at Louvigné in the year VII. If I had drowned the count and that knave Goueznou in the moat, I might have married Yolande in a year's time."

As you see, he began to deplore his not having committed additional crimes.

"Poor Yolande," he cried aloud, as he beat his head against the cell walls, "if I had had the pluck of a goose, she would be alive now, and we might be so happy!" Then his thoughts turned to Spain. Rosa's ardent eyes blazed as guiding stars, and he remembered the fatal words that had already once been his ruin.

"Were you branded as a galley-slave, still I should love you!"

"Oh, this is the woman of my predilection," he cried, rushing round his cell like a wild beast in its cage; "she would understand my nature and aid me to avenge myself on this society which spurns me!"

"Hallo there, up with you, you traitor Chouan!" said a warder, entering abruptly, "you must go to Paris, and your coach is waiting in the yard."

Coignard followed him without retort, shutting up his hatred in his heart where the resolve never to forgive his fellow-men was in course of formation. The vehicle awaiting the hero of Valmy and Quiberon was the infamous prison-van, and the journey was one long torment. Stretched on rank straw, his body shaken by the jolting, ill-treated by the escort troopers, pestered by the savage cruelty of the country folk who came to insult him and even spit at him, the unfortunate man succeeded in presenting an emotionless face and stoical silence. He arrived almost dead with fatigue and exhaustion, but not disheartened. His soul remained firm as iron, though his body had weakened.

Innumerable thoughts assailed him on entering Paris, quitted six years before after such strange adventures. Since the August night when he departed from his brother's at Montreuil, no news had reached him. Neither Alexandre nor Lucette had found the means to get a single letter to him. They might have died, or at least left Paris.

When he found himself again locked up in La Force prison, whence he had so wondrously broken out, his first care was to write to Alexandre, to announce his arrival and beg a visit. Great was the prisoner's joy when, the very next day, he was called out of the exercise ground into the reception-room. There his brother was tearfully awaiting him. Behind, a veiled woman was sobbing, whom he divined to be Lucette. She seemed fifteen years older.

It was a heartrending interview. Alexandre had been long since persuaded that his brother had gone abroad; he expected at any day to hear he had won rank and fortune, and lo! he saw him anew under a shameful accusation. What a painful revulsion. But the honest gardener did not greet the unfortunate man less warmly. His heart had not changed, and he was as devoted to him as previously.

As for Lucette, she took a new lease of life upon beholding Pierre. It little mattered to her that he was disgraced and had loved another woman; her attachment was like that of a dog to its master. She had

refused to return to her father at Langeais, preferring to be Alexandre's housekeeper, in the hope of receiving news of Pierre. Long, sad confidences were exchanged in their first visit—the ex-grenadier relating his experiences, and learning what events had transpired in his absence.

Darius, Carretti, Lexcelent, and Saffieri, had been all condemned to hard labour for life, and sent to Toulon prison. Arcandier had amassed a dazzling fortune under the Directory, and lately Alexandre had been surprised to have a visit from him in a dashing turn-out. He came to inquire about Pierre, and was accompanied by an aristocratic gentleman. The gardener was not able to tell him more than he knew, to wit that he had gone westward in Thermidor, year II, and Arcandier had gone away without having recognised in the humble housekeeper the lovely Baroness de Ravenstein.

This intelligence was a ray of light to Pierre Coignard. The Count de Louvigné, informed by Goueznou's secret correspondence of Yolande's misconduct and her paramour's name, had collected in Paris all the weapons for his dreadful vengeance in embryo, and employed Arcandier to gather the notes he needed. The mean-spirited contractor had been the involuntary instrument of the odious machination, and henceforth Coignard vowed him deadly hatred.

The interview was terminating without Pierre having dared to question his brother on the subject interesting him most. He was dying with desire to ask him for news from Spain, though he dreaded the reply. If Rosa had not written his last hope died, and he dallied with his question lest Alexandre's negative dispelled the illusion.

The hour was about to strike, and the warders were already approaching to move the visitors away, when Pierre whispered, in a voice choking with emotion :

"Have you nothing at all for me?"

"No," answered Alexandre, looking round him.

"Not a note, not a word?" muttered Pierre disconsolately.

"There's a watch on us," observed the brother, "and they are listening, too! Hist! she has written me a dozen times; she loves you still, and is expecting you!" he whispered, so low that the other barely caught the words.

The iron doors were slammed and the captive had just time to shake the hands of his brother and Lucette through the grating. When he regained his dungeon, his face shone and he repeated :

"She loves me and she expects me to come!"

On the 18th of October, in this same year 1800, in the court-room where the Revolutionary Tribunal had condemned the old Count de Sainte-Hélène, Pierre Coignard heard the sentence delivered against him of fourteen years' hard labour. This decree made no stir, though the consequences were to be extraordinary; for the culprit sent to the galleys had done nothing to excite attention. His escape from La Force was remembered only by a few fellow prisoners, and his exploits in Paris and Brittany were utterly unknown to the public. So the few spectators of the commonplace trial listened absently to the judgment given after a brief hearing.

Coignard, prosecuted as accomplice in the burglary committed in Arcandier's residence in 1794, did not even offer a denial, and scarcely

was there one witness called. When the sentence was pronounced the sobbing of a woman alone disturbed the stillness. It was Lucette, unable to suppress her sorrow, and Alexandre Coignard was obliged to carry her out. The condemned man heard his fate with a lofty coolness much disconcerting his judge. He seemed to rejoice in going into penal servitude, and his bearing was inexplicable to all ignorant of his life. This was because something had happened since his return to Paris of immense importance to him.

During his absence, Alexandre had not been able to give Rosa Marcen any information, having none. In her more recent communications the Spaniard had even shown her fear that Pierre was dead inasmuch as he did not write. But as, since the prisoner came back to La Force, the gardener had hastened to notify her, there came two letters together from Spain full of love, hope, and joy. The fiery Southerner had not changed in her fierce passion. She did not doubt Coignard would soon be drawn from the unjust doom he had to suffer. Also informed of the news, the Count de Sainte-Hélène wrote a few lines with his own hand to assure Alexandre of his devotion.

"He once rendered me a service I have never forgotten," he said, "and we will save him though it costs me half my fortune."

Hence everybody was in the plot to restore Coignard the liberty of which he was deprived, and he had some grounds to hope he would find facilities of escape at Toulon denied him in Paris. Besides, that was nearer Tarragona, and he blessed his judges for sending him there.

XNI.

NEVER FORGOTTEN.

FIVE years have gone by. The year 1805 nears its close, and yet Pierre Coignard is still in the galleys. There he had found his former associates, and chance had coupled him with Saffieri the Piedmontese. Darius, loathed by the prisoners, had disappeared, believed to have fallen victim to their vengeance. Coignard seemed perfectly resigned to his fate. Gentle, submissive and hard-working, he was pointed at as a model for the rest of the gang.

The chief warder could not be sufficiently amazed at the alteration in the indomitable character, and he had many times sent up his name for a commutation of the term which he had never obtained, but he hoped to succeed at the next birthday of his Majesty the Emperor. By a rare privilege this convict, quoted highly by his officers, was at the same time worshipped by his mates. He knew about all the plots without taking an active hand in them, but his secrecy and staunchness were so firmly established that he had become the custodian of all the mysteries of the brotherhood. He did not entangle himself, but he did not reveal; and the authorities recognised his position so clearly that they often had recourse to his intervention to quiet the unruly, and never asked him for particulars how it was done.

This exemplary line of conduct had been laid down by Coignard from the reverse feeling to what was supposed. He was believed to be

reconciled to his fate, and yet resignation was never farther from his heart. The love of liberty burned in him brighter and higher than ever, but he had understood, with the natural superiority of his mind, that any baffled escape would retard his deliverance, and he meant to make it a certainty. Moreover, his apparent meekness sprang from the fact that he knew that devoted friends watched over him from afar, and were preparing his flight.

Twice in the five years mysterious advice had reached him by unforeseen modes. He was bidden to keep patient and stand ready, and on the foot of each note Rosa had minutely traced the lines: "I love you and wait."

So did he love and expect, his whole life concentrated in the hope, shared with not a soul besides. His chain-companion, Saffieri, had never overheard one word of Coignard's betraying a longing to be free, and this sudden resignation puzzled him.

"Where's the marvel?" the ex-grenadier would say. "I have 'done' five years and I shall get my ticket next year, so hadn't I better play the lamb than be shot for a wolf trying to jump the wall?"

He never spoke of the past, and he complained of nothing. He had at times expressed a desire to learn how his brother was, but he could not obtain any positive information. Through old convicts come back to the prison, and by kindly-disposed officials, he did hear that Alexandre had been expelled from Toulon, but nobody knew whither he had gone.

The notes he received were not in his brother's handwriting, and nothing indicated that he was in the world of the living. But yet Pierre could not explain how his friends in Spain could correspond with him without Alexandre's intermediation. He alone would put five years' devotion into this task, as dangerous as ungrateful. Had he gone to join the Count de Sainte-Hélène at Tarragona, or was he hidden in Toulon to watch closely over the prisoner, whose liberty he so deeply desired? Pierre was ignorant, but he felt that an occult shield had not been withdrawn from him for a single day.

An unknown benefactor had left a full purse with the prison authorities to procure the felon all allowable treats, and this boon was renewed several times exactly, so that Coignard had been able to help his companions in durance very often out of his superfluity. This help was less precious for the relief it procured him, than for proving he was not forgotten. Besides, this was not the prisoner's only joy.

France, then at war with half Europe, was at peace with Spain, and, notwithstanding the rigorous blockade of an English squadron, vessels from Catalonia ran past the cruisers and entered the port of Toulon. It was an event when such a Spanish barque succeeded in slipping in to the music of the double cannonading of the protecting forts and the British cruisers, a spectacle which the galley slaves witnessed and cheered like the masses. Besides, the Spaniards were sure to come to visit the arsenal, and the felons reckoned on receiving small change from the officers and oranges and lemons from the seamen.

Coignard's feelings were livelier and nearer the heart. Every time that one of these Catalonian brigs, gay with bright paint, was moored

in the harbour, he thought that it might hail from Tarragona and bear him news of Rosa. With secret hope he viewed the grave Spaniards, and sometimes young señoritas in mantillas lounge on the quay. He could fancy he recognised the Count de Sainte-Hélène's loyal face, or the charming features of her who was erst Rosa Marcen, till the sweet vision vanished. They were mere strangers who tendered him alms, which he refused, and he would avert his tearful eyes.

Early in December, 1805, Toulon rejoiced over the arrival of a richly-laden Spanish vessel, which had run the gauntlet on a fine day for winter, before all the population crowding the heights of Faron and La Malgue. That same morning the news of the Battle of Austerlitz had been received, and the great guns announcing that victory mingled their thunder with that of the Fort-Laguillette's batteries firing on the English. The prison itself had tasted of the public rejoicing, for an extra ration of wine had been served out to the convicts.

Coignard had little shared in his chain-companions' coarse gratification, but he was warmly interested in the valiant vessel arriving from the promised land. It had come to moorings at Castigneau, which is outside the arsenal, and our prisoner could only see its red-and-yellow flag streaming from the mainmast, from which he could not detach his eyes. It made him thoughtful to dream that Rosa may have seen those same colours waving in Tarragona port.

Saffieri tried to joke him out of his melancholy, but could not succeed. An inexplicable presentiment had struck Coignard that day, and he regarded the wonderfully escaped vessel as a messenger of liberty. Whilst thus pondering, leaning on a rusty cannon stuck up as a post for head-lines, he remarked an unusual stir at the arsenal gates. The sentries were presenting arms, and gold-braided uniforms were glittering in the sun. Probably some visitor of high degree had come, and ere long, indeed, a small party of officers came on the water side.

The prison governor was doing the honours to a personage of distinguished carriage, on whose arm was a lady dressed in Andalusian fashion. They advanced leisurely. As they approached, Coignard's beat more and more violently, as if his life were at stake.

The central figure in the group was a tall man about forty, very dark and slightly bent. His regular features, enframed in jet black whiskers, wore a remarkable impress of loftiness. He wore a French-cut suit, but an ample cloak draped him like a real Castilian, and his gold-laced cap denoted a high rank in the Spanish navy. It was impossible to make out the lady's features, for her lace mantilla concealed all but the graceful oval; she was justified in preserving it from the sharp north wind. Soon she left her cavalier's arm to take that of the prison governor, who was excessively attentive. The Spanish officer examined the curiosities with serious eyes, but the lady but slightly noted the anchors, cordage, and cannon. Gradually she elbowed the governor towards the working gangs of convicts, and asked him questions animatedly.

The sweet, grave tone of her voice did not seem unknown to the listening Coignard, but he could not concentrate his vague memories. It was not Rosa's voice certainly; there he could not be mistaken. Besides the señorita expressed herself with a marked Spanish accent,

and our prisoner knew no woman in all Spain but Rosa. He believed his great emotion had misled him as he listened to the dialogue going on quite close to him.

"Commander," observed the governor to the Spanish officer, "the *mistral* is rising, and it will be blowing such a tempest to-morrow that the English cruisers will have to run before it."

"I reckoned on that," returned the seaman, "and I shall be off as soon as I get my water in. The king needs all the ships remaining after our loss, and yours too, at Trafalgar, and I have strict orders to get back on the Catalonian coast as soon as possible."

"You will have all your work cut out to reach Barcelona with the north wind," returned the governor, who had instructions not to dilate on the fatal naval action mentioned.

"My ship sails well under short canvas, and I do not fear heavy blows," answered the naval commander. "Besides, we've many havens on the Catalonian coast. If I were driven past Barcelona I could run into Tarragona."

The name was an electric shock to Coignard.

Tarragona! this brig might go to Tarragona! only the other side of that wall a vessel lay which might carry him to the very town where Rosa dwelt! How could he get on board? This wish filled his brain, and blotted out all other ideas till the Spanish woman's voice aroused him like the echo of the speech of a woman once beloved.

"Señor governor," said the lady visitor, "are those men in red suits real galley slaves?"

"Just so, señora, and if you are curious to see some criminal celebrities close to, I will show them you," responded the official, delighted to exhibit his importance.

"Oh, do!" answered the lady with girlish eagerness; "I would like to see a brigand chief such as we have in our Andalusian mountains, or that Fra Diavolo so much spoken of at Naples."

"That is rather hard, señora," replied the governor, laughing. "In France romantic heroes are scarce, and the brigands you speak of are oftener met on the stage than in gaol. Still," he added, bringing her up to the nearest gang, "I can show you a typical representative of the daring desperado."

"That's something to see," cried the Spaniard. "What's he done—ever so many murders?"

"Not precisely, but he commanded a band of irregulars in Brittany, where, they say," he went on mysteriously, "two or three noble ladies fell in love with him."

The visitor started, which the official set down to the effect of his speech, and then advanced briskly.

"Is this the man?" she inquired, pointing to Saffieri.

"No, señora, his companion, the tall fellow who is glaring as if to eat you. Here, come and bow to the lady, you! She never before saw an officer of the king in a red jacket," he said to Coignard, who winced at the jest.

But soon his whole attention was absorbed by the lady. She really looked at him whilst affecting to scan Saffieri, her eyes burning through her veil. But he feared he was in error, and, doffing his cap

respectfully, he stood impassibly before the governor, who delighted in having such a splendid specimen of his flock to parade.

For a few instants the lady said never a word, though her fan quivered, and Coignard thought her bosom heaved with emotion ; but it was in a steady voice enough that she presently said : " If he were once happy he must suffer here now. Can I do anything to relieve him, señor governor ? "

" Against the regulations, señora, and, besides, this prisoner lacks nothing—I often receive money for him. "

" Yet I would have done something to soften his woes, " went on the Spaniard slowly ; whilst Coignard remarked that the fan had dropped along her side, and that the fingers of the hand holding it made him a sign.

" His woes are lessened, señora, since you have pitied him, " said the official, though his laboured gallantry did not much impress her.

" Let us proceed, " said she, drawing her cavalier away.

Farther on, the Spanish captain was chatting with some naval officers. The lady had taken several steps to join him when Coignard perceived that the fan had dropped to the ground. He sprang upon it, and was going to hasten after her to restore it when he perceived a rolled up paper pinned to it. It took scarce a second to unfasten it and hide it away. At the rattle of the chain dragged by the two coupled convicts the governor had wheeled round, but Coignard had time to offer the fan to the lady before he could intervene. She uttered a little ejaculation more in surprise than disgust, and thanked him with an emotion which the bystander attributed to pleasure at the restoration of an article so indispensable to an Andalusian.

" You see, señora, that we have honest folk here, " the functionary said, delightedly ; " but we have no time to lose if you wish to see all the lions. We will take the rope-walk next, if you please. "

The party went on its way, leaving Coignard alone with his companion. Luckily the whole affair had no other witnesses, the warders and the gangs having kept back deferentially. Saffieri alone had seen the note picked off, and he had become the surest devotee of his pal. He carried his reserve so far as never to question him about the mysterious missives he had already twice received. Coignard was a superior being in his eyes, whom he was ready to serve without arguing, and ready to follow anywhere.

When alone the two exchanged a glance of understanding. The hour of rest coming, Coignard threw himself on a coil of rope, and Saffieri, standing to cover him, said, as a matter of course : " Read away, I'll watch. "

Coignard thanked him with a look and opened the letter with unspeakable emotion. It meant hope and comfort for two or three years perhaps, and no wonder his hand shook. As before, the handwriting was perfectly strange to him, but, instead of a laconic piece of advice, the paper was this time covered with distinct but closely written lines.

" The time has come. At dark to-morrow the Spanish brig at Castigneau will haul out to sea. It will be taking its water aboard all day ; a gang of convicts being asked for to help the shipmen, you will be one of them, for the permission will be obtained. The casks will

be hoisted out on the dock side to be filled. The two last on the second row will be marked with red chalk 'R. M.,' the heads arranged so they will come off and can be held in. With the files you received in the last sending you should cut your irons during the day, so as to be free to get into one of the casks. You will be forced to let your chain-companion into the secret, so promise him safety by entering the other cask. The Spanish sailors know what is afoot, and will help all they can. As soon as you are in the casks the captain will order 'all aboard,' and the casks will be tumbled in, full or empty, and the moorings will be cast off and the brig will clear. As soon as it is off soundings you will be delivered from your new prison, and there will be only the English to fear. The captain believes he is helping royalist officers condemned for political offences, and he relies on your aiding in defence of the Spanish flag if he be attacked on the voyage. Do not waver. It has taken five years to have all ready and the chance will not come again."

In the lower corner were lines almost imperceptible from fineness, "I am awaiting you and I love you. " ROSA MARCEN."

After kissing this and weeping over it, Coignard dwelt, thoughtful and motionless, for a long while.

Saffieri continued to stand guard, respecting his meditation, for he was used to these fits of silent melancholy, taking them for regrets over the past, heart griefs, memories revived by correspondence with an ancient flame. He was convinced that the galley-slave soldier was resigned to abide the appeal to imperial clemency. This time he felt pity for him, on noting the violent agitation revealed by his twitching lineaments, and growled at love coming into prison where it was so out of place.

"How can so fine a mind worry over such foolery!" thought the Italian. "If he had not his countesses to muddle over, he would have had a fly for freedom long ago."

"Would you like to escape with me?" queried Coignard, suddenly, as if out of a dream.

Saffieri feared he had gone mad.

"Escape!" he repeated merrily; "I ask nothing better, but it takes more than the sheer wishing."

"I ask you if you want to escape," repeated Coignard. "I will manage the rest."

"Are you serious in what you are saying?"

"You ought to know that I never joke."

"Well," said the Piedmontese, hesitating, "fellows do manage in getting out, but they only get trapped again; and then comes the flogging, and, worst of all, the additional term——"

"There will be neither bastinado nor extra imprisonment," rejoined Coignard; "there will be freedom for ever, or"—looking Saffieri squarely in the face, he went on firmly to say: "or death!"

"Death!" reiterated the other astounded. "The deuce! this requires thinking over." But catching a scornful glance, he quickly added: "But I do not fear old Boney, and if you promise me there shall be no recapture, I will follow you blindly."

"I promise you that."

"I am ready, then. Tell me what I am to do."

"To-day, help me to file our irons through. To-morrow, I will explain the rest."

"File our irons?" said Saffieri, again believing his companion was mad. "How."

"I have had a couple of first-class files these two years," said Coignard, simply.

"And never told me?" reproached the Italian, surprisedly and distrustfully.

"Why should I?" responded the other coolly. "I did not want to use them until escape was sure. Now it is, and here are the jokers. Take one and set to work."

"Not now," replied Saffieri, who had not ceased to watch, "there goes the head-warder ringing to work again. We will pitch in to-night. At what hour do we start to-morrow?" he went on gaily as if he were talking about catching the mail coach.

"At night-fall."

"Then we have time to pack up our things."

"Can we rely on the gang?" inquired Coignard, warily.

"That depends. If their necks are in danger, I doubt it."

"All we want of them is to kick up a dust for a few minutes, so that the warders can see nothing."

"Oh, they'll all be on for that game. I am not sour in their mouths and you are a regular lollipop. To say nothing of this being our right, for we have let our turn go by three times."

"Then," said Coignard, giving his mate's elbow a jog, "we shall not spend to-morrow night in this bell."

"Amen!" returned the Italian. "I was beginning to get bored myself."

The work bell cut short their talk, and the afternoon began which closed without any incident. When Coignard and Saffieri extended themselves on the hard camp-bed of their room at night, they began on the fetters. The watchers could but faintly discern movements in the immense dormitory, dimly lit by dull lanterns. The sound alone might betray them, but they filed with the files greased, and so warily that none but their neighbours heard them, and they were not astonished by such preparatives for a break out, and were not capable of denouncing them.

The work was simply to sever the coupling chain all but entirely, so that it could be snapped at a given moment. The anklet could be left intact. Once safe aboard the ship, the fugitives would have plenty of time to be entirely freed, and it would have been imprudent to expose a tampered-with anklet to the hammer stroke of the *sounder* or smith, who "rang" the fetters every morning when the convicts came out to work. This test was almost never applied to the coupling links. It was enough if the chains preserved the appearance of solidity, and the cut was made in this end whilst leaving the iron breakable.

The task was accomplished before daylight, and Coignard tried to sleep, but hope kept him restless despite his will.

After five years' dissimulated longings and constrained fretfulness, he touched liberty, without knowing who brought it. The mysterious advice told him next to nothing. Rosa had written her name in the corner, but the note was not hers and the veiled Spaniard had neither her voice nor aspect. She did not seem unknown, but it was hard to believe that any woman would place her devotion at the service of another woman.

Much calmer, Saffieri roused him from his brooding to inquire if the gang were to be notified before they turned out on "fatigue" duty. The time when the convicts crowded out of the main-hall was a favourable opportunity to pass a word around, and hence it was then that news was imparted.

"Too soon," said Coignard, who feared he would not be ordered to Castigneau, and cared not to circulate his secret uselessly.

The gun of the ship on station announced the "turn out," the prison bell rang, and the convicts, from whom the gang-bar was removed, were divided by pairs into gangs. The port labourers received their wine rations, and marched off under gangers.

This was a period of unspeakable anguish for Coignard. If sent to his usual place in the dockyard his dream of deliverance was annihilated. Saffieri, full of absolute faith, questioned his mate with a look for instructions. The two first gangs were marched off to Saint Mandrier. Pale with emotion Coignard awaited his fate. He could not help doubting the Spanish captain's influence and the promises in the letter.

"Gangs three and four to Castigneau," read the house master.

The ex-grenadier took breath again.

"I say," whispered Saffieri, "you did not expect we'd be shifted to-day, did you? We've missed the tip, eh?"

"We've made it," muttered the other with joy.

"Hallo!" cried Saffieri, who had not been fully informed, "do you know we are bound to Castigneau?"

"Yes."

"Is that right?"

"Right to get us aboard the Spanish brig which takes us hence."

"The Spanish brig! Now I begin to believe we shall not sleep in Room No. 4 to-night," exclaimed the Italian, viewing his comrade in admiration.

The tramp to Castigneau did not take long, and was executed in a disorder caused by the badness of the road which favoured conversation.

"Pass the word we are going to step it," said Coignard to his mate.

The order was circulated with that celerity and precision common in prisons, from mouth to mouth, so that, in less than a minute, both gangs knew that the officer—as they nicknamed Coignard—at last claimed his turn to escape. Not a word or a gesture gave alarm to the warders as the felons made ready to help their comrades. This is a sacred duty under gaol-bird law, and nobody shrinks. The ex-grenadier was so esteemed, moreover, that the announcement of his attempt greatly excited devotion. There was not one unready to do his utmost to contribute towards the success.

When the gangs arrived at Castigneau the sailors were already at work, though the day had hardly broke. The ballast was already

aboard, and the commander, in undress on the quay, was superintending the next move.

At the first glance Coignard saw the casks in rows near the water's-edge, and with the instinct developed by the thirst for liberty, he spied through the grey light the letters denoting the two prepared ones. Placed as announced, at the end of the inner row, they would be the last to be shipped. Hence Coignard guessed that he must not hide himself therein until the time when the scuffle from hasty loading would prevent the keepers noticing his disappearance.

The *mistral*, after blowing all night long, redoubled in violence; a storm impended, and the seaward look-out signalled that the English were already standing off the land. All conspired to clear the course of the brig, and Coignard was not such an ignorant landsman as not to remark that the ship was ready to sail rapidly: she was held merely by a head line and a stern line, with two lines out on the other side to buoys, all of which could be cast off sharp and hauled in, so that she might spin away before the gale.

The plan of the unknown friends appeared quite clear. The snapping up the captives was to take place at the last moment, so that, even if the warders perceived the loss of their prey, they could only howl after the fleeting barque. A narrow gangway led from the dock ledge to the ship's deck, which Coignard viewed fondly as the path to freedom.

December days are short, and the loading took the shipmen and convicts up to five o'clock. The weather had become dreadful. The rollers came even into port, and made the brig stagger as if at sea. Taking in the scrap iron ballast and water casks became difficult, and the captain kept hurrying on all hands. The casks, filled at the port pump, were handled briskly. All of a sudden a north-east squall fell on the ship and made her spars creak. The Spaniard thundered for all the casks to be tumbled in lively, full or empty, leaped on board, and ran to the stern to give out the sailing orders.

"Now!" said Coignard to Saffieri.

"Ready," responded the latter, and he cried to the convicts, sure the wind would drown his voice: "Stand by to help us, mates!"

With incredible unanimity the whole gang rushed about the casks and hustled the pair out of sight in the midst of the tumultuous whirl. They snapped their coupling chain at one pull. Coignard took out the head of one barrel, crawled in, reversed himself, called out to Saffieri, "Do the same!" and covered himself in with the head board. The Piedmontese did the same, and when the bustle was over nothing revealed to even the most experienced warder that anything had happened. It was no time to tell noses, for the other felons took the cue from Lexcellent and Carretti to roll the casks aboard. They took charge of the two containing their mates.

"They shall not stifle!" said Lexcellent, knocking out the bung of his with a "springing" blow of his fist.

"To say nothing of how quick they'll be aboard to broach the barrel," added Carretti, laughing.

On the ship all was ready, the men drawing home the sheets of the shaken out sails, the man at the wheel, and the captain on the poop. The last two casks came up the gangway. Lexcellent was still strong

man enough to trundle his within the bulwark like a hoop, and Carretti's was almost home when a roller came under the brig and unshipped the gang-plank. The barrel rolled from under the galley-slave's hands, danced on the edge a moment, and dropped into the water. A piercing scream resounded from the brig, and a pale woman appeared by the gunnel, who threw up her arms as if she would leap in as well. The cask did not come up—the water had staved in the unfastened head, and one of the freedom-seekers was swallowed up for ever.

A roar: "Let go of all!" rose above that of the gale, the wet ropes were drawn in upon the ship, and she slewed round into her course and shot off into the gloom. The two galley-slaves had been dragged upon the dock clinging to the plank, and stood aghast.

"One's got away, anyhow!" said Carretti, after a long silence.

"Ay, but which?" queried L'excellent, cursing at his own narrow escape.

XXII.

THE NEW ASSUMPTION.

PIERRE COIGNARD was the one saved.

By further good fortune the brig carried him past the English fleet, and he was landed at Tarragona only five days after his escape. Rosa had at length realised the dream of her girlhood. The object of her strange love was restored to her, with consequences easily foretold.

Welcomed with open arms by the Count de Sainte-Hélène, Coignard repaid his generous hospitality with the most shameful treachery. He became Rosa's paramour without being suspected. Moreover, the loyal nobleman obtained for the man, whom he passed off as a political refugee, a sub-lieutenant's commission in a Swiss regiment of which he commanded a battalion.

Two years passed thus, and the guilty passion only augmented. Many a time they had thought of the sole obstacle to their union, though they had never dared put into speech what their eyes expressed when they spoke of Pontis. Guilty in mind, they waited but for the opportunity which events were soon to furnish.

King Charles IV, brought to Bayonne, had been forced to abdicate in favour of his son Ferdinand. He was dispossessed of his throne, as history tells us. The French were already surprising all the northern strongholds, notably Barcelona. But in the unoccupied places the natives were determined not to suffer the foreign yoke. On the 30th of May, 1808, St. Ferdinand's day, the insurrection broke out in all still uncaptured towns. The count's regiment was at Valencia, where things soon took such a turn that Pontis resolved to quit it and go with Rosa and Coignard into Estramadura, to join the celebrated guerilla leader Mina, who was forming an army. This perilous journey through all Spain favoured the lovers' secret hope.

The old mansion in Tarragona, where Sainte-Hélène had passed many happy days, was left in charge of Alexandre Coignard and Lucette, whom the countess had invited to Spain some two years before and whose devotion had never grown cold.

On the morning of the 19th of June, 1808, the count, Pierre Coignard, and Rosa, all on horseback, rode out of Valencia on the Arragon road. They were in holiday riding dress, the lady in a deep green cloth habit, the soldier in a Swiss officer's uniform, and the nobleman in plain dress. In order to deceive the watchfulness of the fanatical populace, they pretended to be going out for a day's pleasure excursion. But when at some distance they halted.

Pontis changed his clothes for those of a rich Catalanian farmer from a saddle bag. Coignard remained as he was, as the Swiss forces were being courted by both sides, and he could traverse either camp unimpeded. Rosa, alighting, tore off her habit and had her lady's saddle removed to show there was a man's underneath. She made a bundle of the cast off clothes, which Coignard hurled into a ravine. Then they took breakfast by the roadside before remounting and starting off at a sharp pace.

Rosa was adorable in her disguise—the real Spanish costume, dark blue vest braided with black, primrose waistcoat and belt, silver-striped blue velvet breeches and gaiters, ornamented with numerous leather clasps. On her head the sombrero with a wool ball. Her finely-gauntleted hand carried a long Valencian whip, not needed, as she rode a choice Arab named Zerga, meaning blue, for the Algerians term iron-grey “blue.”

Pierre dexterously bestrode a magnificent wholly black Andalusian, whilst Pontis mounted a fashionable greyhound-like English bay stallion.

At about five P.M. they reached Murviedro, a little place built on the site of the ancient Saguntum. Rosa wished the ride to be continued so as to join some of the detachments skirmishing with the French as soon as possible. But the horses were tired, and they had to stop to sup and sleep. They were given separate rooms in the *posada*, which enabled Rosa to come, dressed as she was, into Coignard's room to awaken him, and say :

“Pierre, it is time.”

“For what, dear Rosa?”

“I must be free in a week. In the first action the count must die.”

“Rosa!”

“If you have not enough love for me to take the count into the thick of the fight; if the enemy's bullets do not do the work I hope to see done,” she went on, looking him full in the eyes as though to reveal her thought, “there are pistols in my holster with charges that sleep—but which I have the spirit to arouse, look you.”

This said, she turned her face from Pierre, went back to her chamber, flung herself on the couch in her clothes, and slumbered unbrokenly. But the tempted man never slept a wink. At six o'clock the travellers started with the intention of making a long stage. Zerga was fresh and full of fire, as if the previous day's journey was forgotten. The two others were sufficiently rested to keep pace.

The gentlemen had both well armed themselves for fear of ugly encounters, Pierre carrying a blunderbuss besides ordinary arms, and Pontis supplementing his sword with a brace of pistols.

After passing Almenara and Nules the trio plunged into a mountain

road which Pontis knew, or said he knew, to shorten the journey by a good third. For an hour the road was fair, and the horses galloped. But gradually the way dwindled into a gully, and the gully lessened into a path. This path suddenly stopped at the base of a cliff, on the flank of which one could barely trace steps—a goat's-path familiar to smugglers. It was seven in the evening.

"I have blundered," said Pontis; "but, by going back, we will find the right road on the left."

They turned, found it, and again dashed forward. But the mountain towered steep each side; at every stride loose stones rattled down over the precipices with hideous clatter. The way became so rugged that they had to deliberate whether prudence did not command a halt, but a stretch of level land showed itself a hundred paces beyond, and they pushed on for it. Under the spur the steeds made a final effort, and in ten minutes they reached a plain surrounded by black rocks. This road, too, was therefore no thoroughfare.

Night fell. They had to camp there under pain of running the greatest dangers if they went down. They supped on provisions brought from Murviedro. The sun went down in splendour from the sierra; a marvellous panorama was unrolled before their eyes: the orange-tree-studded plain of Valencia with the darksome Mediterranean spangled with a few gay lateen sails; and behind a peak on the left the setting sun. But Rosa was no poet, and the two men were debating about the roads. After eating, Pontis rose impatiently.

"It will be night in a quarter of an hour," he said. "Before we roll ourselves up in our cloaks to sleep till daybreak, I should like to see if there be not some gap in the rocks."

"Let us lose no time over it, then," replied Pierre.

"Let's look yonder first," said the count, pointing to a tall split on the right of the tableland, and walking thither.

Coignard and Rosa followed him, to find it was merely a gigantic niche in the perpendicular rock. Undaunted, they continued their exploration. A couple of hundred steps farther a rapid slope led down into a gorge, which might offer a road. Pontis went first. But he soon arrived at a spot where the steep declivity ended in a precipice. The sunbeams were fading behind the mountains. The defile wore a lugubrious aspect. On either side rose gigantic rocks; behind the travellers the level, where the horses whinnied uneasily, before them the gulf, whence arose a murmur.

"Turn back, we must put it off till to-morrow," said Pontis.

Scarce had he finished the words when he uttered a terrible scream, one that the echoes repeated with awful persistence. This black mountain with its gloomy gorges was fit scenery for a death tragedy. But all at once, only a few feet beneath the petrified pair, they heard the count's sonorous voice.

"Pierre, Pierre, hither!"

The ex-convict and the woman leaned forward. The night was clear enough for them to distinguish Pontis, checked by a miracle in his fall. On turning, his foot had slipped on a smooth stone and he had pitched forward, sliding over the sharp brink. Had not the pointed stump of a dead pine been there, on which his vest caught, he would

have met his death. As it was, he hung there with no power to save himself. Yet, without any danger and with no effort, Coignard could have rescued him by merely holding out his hand. He did not hesitate one minute, but bent forward, kneeling down in order to make sure of not being dragged over by the nobleman. But even as he stretched forth his arm something restrained it. It was Rosa.

With eyes shining in the shade like a tigress's, she silently gave him to understand that she did not wish her husband rescued. He shuddered, and, in spite of all, made an attempt to offer his hand. But Rosa was stronger than he.

"Quick, Pierre," cried the noble.

No response, though the cloth could be heard slowly ripping.

"Oh, this is dreadful, Rosa!" groaned Coignard.

"Do you love me?" simply asked the wretch of a woman.

Pierre bowed his head, staring at the supplicating count.

"I am dying. Help! Your hand—only your hand. You shall have half my fortune."

The tearing cloth would barely allow a minute more ere all would be over.

"Pierre, I have showered kindnesses upon you—you shall be even as my brother."

"Pierre, you shall be my husband," said Rosa slowly, to be the more cruel.

Coignard did not stir. Pontis's nails were heard scratching at the rock to which he endeavoured to cling—a malediction arose and a thrilling shriek. The body fell heavily into the abyss. There was no more a Count de Sainte-Hélène. Coignard hid his face in his hands.

"Free!" ejaculated the Spaniard.

By an impulse rather of instinct than reason, they ran back to the horses and sprang into the saddle. A magnificent moonrise illuminated the heights, and they could see almost as well as by day. They set to descending the rugged road by which they had reached the plateau, but it was only by miracles that they did not also glide into the gulf. Coignard spurred his horse, and Rosa gave the Arab the rein to make them devour space.

They raced on and on without knowing whither, fleeing the awful sight of the count hanging over the abyss, and cursing them with his last breath. In the whistling wind they heard his death-cry, the supreme appeal of the unfortunate noble as he sank into the depths. They did not speak, and they were afraid to look at one another. Their furious course intoxicated them gradually, the same idea hurried them over the breakneck slopes of the sierra—away from the ravine that engulfed the deceived count.

Coignard's horse was the first to stop before a granite wall which also checked Zerga, notwithstanding its mistress's goading. Anything like a road had long since disappeared, and their mad gallop had led them into a trap. For the first time since the count's death the lovers looked round. This was the hour of liberty for which they had been longing for fifteen years, and yet, instead of rushing into one another's

arms, they kept gloomily aloof. Already the spectre of Pontis rose between them.

"What shall we do now?" queried the Frenchman in a broken voice.

"Flee!" said Rosa, after a pause.

"Impossible! If we keep in the mountains we must fall to-morrow on the outposts of the Montserrat insurgents."

"Tush! who cares!"

"You are right. Better to have done at once," said Coignard, suddenly.

"What do you mean?"

"That I shall be asked what became of the Count de Sainte-Hélène, who is expected in Estramadura; that I shall be held as his murderer, perhaps also as a spy, and then shot. You, Rosa, can return to Tarragona."

She turned pale at her husband's name, but answered not.

"Do you imagine," went on Coignard, bitterly, "that an officer in the royal army, a noble of an ancient line, allied to the oldest house in Tarragona, can disappear without anybody inquiring as to his fate?"

Ghastly pale Rosa let her head sink on her bosom; but suddenly she raised it, as if galvanised. Her face became vivified, the blood rushed to her cheeks, and her eyes expressed unconquerable resolution.

"The Count de Sainte-Hélène is not dead," she said in a ringing voice, "and his wife is here."

"Ah! this is the only woe that was spared me," moaned Coignard. "She has gone crazy."

"Yes," resumed Rosa, animatedly; "you are henceforward Henri Pontis, Count de Sainte-Hélène, my betrothed these ten years, and you wedded me yesterday before the hermit of Montserrat."

Her lover began to see clearly. In a vision of the past their farewell on the Ile des Cygnes flashed on his mind like the scorching flame of molten iron. That night, on quitting the nobleman after giving him his family papers, he had for a second dreamed of appropriating the name which would give him rank, wealth, and, above all, Rosa's hand. The dream was realised. One word had opened endless prospects to his adventurous spirit. The Count de Sainte-Hélène was he—the locksmith of Langeais, the grenadier of the Republic, the captain of the Chouans, the galley-slave of Toulon!

"Why not?" he thought. "A man who has been the King of France's officer may well command a Spanish force. The lover of the Countess de Louvigné may well marry the daughter of a Catalonian noble."

He looked at Rosa, and fancied he read disdain in her gaze. He had faltered, and she never did.

"Rosa," said he, with that tone which women cannot misinterpret, "I love you, and I am the Count de Sainte-Hélène."

Indescribable boldness impassioned his energetic features. After a while, bent under the unforeseen weight of his new fortune, the ambitious adventurer proudly raised his head, and seemed a human eagle ready to swoop on the world.

"Well spoken, Pierre!" said Rosa in a moved voice; "it is thus I love you!"

The bridles hung on the necks of the horses as Coignard drew his beloved to his heart, and their souls commingled in a burning kiss. At that moment was decided the life of both. Rosa disengaged herself from the embrace, and managed to say :

"Let us go on. Darkness must not overtake us in the sierra."

"But we are not going to Estramadura now !" remarked Coignard, again bowing to the ascendancy of the intrepid woman.

"No—to Madrid, to join the French army, in which it is my wish you shall command a regiment before the war is over."

XXIII.

UNDER THE MASK.

NEW life commenced for the lovers a fortnight after the horrible scene in the mountains.

Coignard had boldly presented himself to Marshal Soult, who was entering Spain with his army, as Count Pontis de Sainte-Hélène, a refugee nobleman who had quitted the Spanish military service so as not to fight against his countrymen, and had come from Valencia with his young wife to avoid the insurrection. Fortunately the family papers were in the saddle-bag of Rosa's horse.

The story did not arouse the ghost of a suspicion.

The exiled nobles were very heartily received when they wished to enter the Imperial armies, and this one was appointed captain as a beginning. His perfect knowledge of the language and manners of the country made him most useful, and he was soon entrusted with delicate and risky missions which brought him into notice.

Rosa had taken up her residence in Madrid, where she persisted in shunning society, and living in absolute seclusion. Her lover's functions often enough brought him to her. She then showed herself in public with him, but, during his absences, received no callers. Always wearing black, as though in mourning, she seemed bent on concealing her striking beauty. She may have been repugnant to letting her fellow-countrymen see one whose husband served in the invading army, but a more positive reason explained her solitude. When the true Count de Sainte-Hélène left Valencia, he did not foresee he would never be in Tarragona again, and he had taken but little ready money. That for travelling expenses was in Coignard's portmanteau. The guilty pair had not scorned this heritage of the crime, but it had been almost entirely absorbed by the setting up housekeeping in Madrid.

Rosa's property consisted in Tarragona houses, and that town was the headquarters of the revolution in Catalonia. Not the least revenue could be expected therefrom till the French took possession, and that was a remote contingency from the turn events were assuming. Hence, the countess was obliged to live on a limited income, but she did so without any complaint or expression of regret. Her natural inclinations enhanced her temper, and she became more imperious, resolute, and impassioned than ever. Her rare loveliness was marvellously unimpaired, and she eclipsed all the Madrid beauties when she appeared on the Prado with

the new Pontis. But she little sought such triumphs, and reserved the treasures which all coveted for the only man she loved.

Coignard had totally forgotten the past, and believed he had at last found happiness. Adored by Rosa, liked by his comrades, and noted by his leaders, he led a loving and dashing life which realised all his dreams, and he reckoned on returning home some day with a high rank and recognised title.

Chance had wonderfully helped him in the first years of his usurpation. None of the hazards of the campaign had brought him into contact with acquaintances of the real Pontis, and still less with those who had known grenadier Pierre Coignard.

He passed the end of 1808 and the following year in daring adventures by which he profited. His natural fearlessness, and the military acumen required in Brittany, thoroughly served him on the battle-field; his supple and strategic spirit equally served him in secret missions.

A dozen times without capture he carried orders through the insurgent and English lines. At the end of 1810 he was appointed major. Events took a change. 1812 brought nothing but reverses to the French armies at both ends of Europe.

Coignard fought bravely to the end of the disastrous retreat that forced the French troops from Cadiz to Toulouse, and when peace was signed his military reputation was solemnly established in the whole army of the marshal who had the honour to fire the last shot in the sad war with Spain.

The crisis was critical for the whilom galley-slave to espouse the cause of the new Government, but he did not flinch.

On the 28th of June, 1814, King Louis XVIII received a nobleman in his cabinet in the Tuileries who had besought a private audience. Pierre Coignard, for it was he, spoke warmly of his race and ancestors, painted the miseries they had undergone, enumerated their losses, and offered himself to the Bourbons. Louis received him affectionately, expressed himself happy to welcome the last of the Counts Pontis de Sainte-Hélène, and promised him his high protection. A keen wit, and of prodigious memory, he none the less was far from suspecting that the fashionable gentleman had been five years in Toulon prison, and he even believed he recognised the features of a young officer seen about the Court before 1789. Thenceforward the claimant's fortune was ensured.

Rosa, who entered France some months subsequently, brought Alexandre and Lucette with her. They all dwelt in the house in the Rue Saint-Maur, which was cheaply redecored, for the soldier meant to have a meet yet modest establishment when sent for by the king. This was artful management, for when the restored monarch was besieged by penniless exiled noblemen, the descendant of the old race of Pontis, who asked only for a favour that cost him nothing, was sure to be well received. Coignard knew that money would come after the royal favour, and he had the means to maintain a fair show for several months. Whilst waiting the shower of gold, he profited by his reception at the palace to create new relations and renew old family friendships. He was fortunate in this respect too, and old noblemen who had seen the Count de Sainte-Hélène who died on the scaffold

in 1794, made no to-do about greeting his son. The most aristocratic drawing-rooms opened to the last scion of a family believed to be extinct, and the fame he had won in Napoleon's army still further gilded his position in the fashionable part of the capital.

Rosa had wished to remain outside this aureola. As at Madrid, she preferred complete isolation, and hardly once left the house wherein she had met Pierre Coignard for the first time. It was said at court that the Count de Sainte-Hélène had married in Spain a lady who shut herself up for pious acts, and avoided the joys of this world. Whilst his brother trod the highest steps of fortune, Alexandre watched in the lower regions. Thence alone could danger to the false peer come; any encounter, though scarcely probable, must be avoided with prison mates from Toulon, and it was Alexandre's duty to learn all he could of their movements in their resorts in town. Thus protected, the adventurer seemed unassailable.

The return of Napoleon from the island of Elba, if it checked his rise for three months, furnished him with a broader basis for consolidating the favour he already enjoyed beside the sovereign. He did not hesitate to leave Rosa in Paris whilst he followed the fugitive king to Ghent. Misfortune renders men trustful, and the twice-exiled monarch became more and more attached to the valiant and faithful servitor who clung to him when under a cloud. The recompense for so much zeal was not long coming, for, in September, 1815, when the king was again seated on his fathers' throne, Count Henri Pontis de Sainte-Hélène was appointed lieutenant-colonel of the 72nd Foot, or "Legion of the Seine," garrisoned at Paris. Before the year's end he was officer of the Legion of Honour and Chevalier de Saint-Louis, and the Dauphin talked of making him one of his aides-de-camp.

So the most high-flown dreams of the Convention grenadier were almost all realised. Rank, title, worldly position, all these were his. This perfect bliss lasted upwards of three years.

At the beginning of 1818 the 72nd line regiment was selected to garrison Rouen, and though the acting colonel tried to avoid the transfer, he had to be ready to march early in May from the Place Vendôme. In a new uniform, upon a superb charger, Lieut.-Colonel Count de Sainte-Hélène dazzled the crowd with his haughty mien, and his name was repeated far and near. Some veterans of the war with Spain in the throng related his exploits at Tarragona and Vittoria, and the townsfolk were amazed to see him look so young and handsome after such rough campaigns. This reception did not appear to displease the noble colonel, who condescended to make his horse rear when he passed before the ladies.

One solitary beholder did not seem to share in the general enthusiasm. He was a ragged fellow, whom the colonel's steed had nearly trodden on a couple of times, and he snarled at him whilst eyeing him narrowly. This beggar or lunatic gesticulated so wildly that everybody noticed him except the officer, too busy in parading himself to pay heed to so insignificant a person.

The review terminated with a march past. Pontis took the lead of the regiment commanded by him in the colonel's absence to escort the flag to the Nouvelle-France Barracks, after which he rode slowly home

alone through the main streets to his house in the Rue Basse-Saint-Denis. Never had he felt happier. All had succeeded to a charm these two years. Monetary embarrassment had disappeared, and honours seemed attracted to him. For the first time he revelled in that mental peace which is the crown of happiness. The future was cloudless, and he might reasonably hope that after his turn at Rouen he could return and reign at court.

When free of his military harness and lolling on the parlour lounge, he rang for his valet, and his brother Alexandre, who had filled that confidential post since a year, hastened to take his orders.

"You know that I must go to-morrow, and shall be a month away," he said familiarly.

"What a height we have ascended since Langeais!" said the former gardener admiringly.

"Rather rough climbing, but the nest is downy and worth sticking to. Yet I am on thorns sometimes," added he after a pause.

"Pooh! Pierre Coignard is dead beyond digging up."

"There were four thousand of us in Toulon gaol, and all felons flock to the city."

"Very true, but I fear nothing from that quarter," said Alexandre emphatically. "You are altered beyond recognition, and even though one of the gang knew you, he would keep mum. You were liked too well there to be bothered here."

"Yes, I had true friends in the prison," observed the count pensively.

"Let me tell you that in five years you will be a general, and in ten a peer of the realm."

There came a gentle tap at the door. Alexandre assumed a respectful demeanour and let in a footman, whose face wore an expression of astonishment as he said:

"There is a man below who insists on seeing your lordship."

"A man! you mean a soldier!"

"No, my lord, much more like a vagrant, for he is very tattered."

"Why have you let him in? Send him about his business."

"He maintained that he must speak with your lordship on matters of the utmost consequence."

"Some beggar indeed," muttered Pontis abstractedly. "Just see what it is, Alexandre."

The footman retired with Alexandre going to expel the importunate intruder. The colonel was musing over his departure when the noise of an altercation made him turn his head. A voice not unknown was speaking animatedly in the ante-chamber, the door of which opened roughly, and a man whom the Count de Sainte-Hélène immediately recognised, rushed into the sitting-room.

"Darius!" ejaculated the impostor, receding as from a spectre.

It was really his old companion convict, the informer, the traitor crushed, it was reported, in Toulon arsenal, who tramped into the room. Old and bent with misery, his mean wickedness had not lost its impression upon him, and he straightened up with glee to think he could wreak spite on his twenty years' enemy. Behind him came Alexandre, prudently shutting the door, and ready to help his brother at a beck or call.

"It looks as if you knew me again," said Darius slowly.

Coignard had time to recover his self-command, and in an instant his course was planned out. Boldness was the best buckler, he thought. To recognise Darius was to negotiate with him, and put himself for ever under the thumb of a wretch who had long since distinguished himself in betrayals. By driving him away Coignard exposed himself to a denunciation, but he believed he was sheltered against any storms. It was reasonable to suppose that the authorities would look twice before suspecting the identity of the Count de Sainte-Hélène, and that a felon's declaration would have no great weight. If only in fear of a scandal, the Government ought to shrink from an inquiry.

Rapidly making these reflections, Coignard rose, caught hold of a bell-pull, and said with the most perfect calm :

"The Count de Sainte-Hélène has nothing to do with a ragamuffin like you. If you do not quit the house on the instant, I will have you put out by my servants."

"If there's any ragamuffin here, hang me if it be not you," retorted Darius in a voice quivering with rage. "You are not the Count de Saint-Hélène, but Pierre Coignard; mark that well! the Pierre Coignard condemned to penal servitude, for burglary, in the year IX of the Republic; Pierre Coignard, No. 8044 in Toulon prison."

"If this fellow does not at once leave, throw him out!" said the count to Alexandre.

"And I know your thrower-out, too," went on Darius. "It is your brother Alexandre Coignard, who was gardener at Montreuil. He will catch it hot, too."

"Do as you are told," said the colonel.

Alexandre collared the intruder.

"You are wrong, Pierre," whined the other, changing his key. "I don't want to injure you, but I am dying of starvation. Give your old pal a little help, and I will let you alone. But if you won't, I shall put the police on you."

Coignard's hesitation was but short.

"If I yield to-day he'll be back to-morrow to bleed me," he reasoned.

So he made a sign for his brother to seize Darius and turn him out, notwithstanding his oaths and menaces. The footman in the ante-chamber had been stupefied by this inroad, and heard the convict's words as he was hurried down stairs.

"Before night you shall both hear from me!"

The valet returned dejected, not having his brother's firmness, and unaccustomed to extreme situations.

"What shall we do?" he anxiously inquired, after dismissing the lackey.

"Nothing," replied Pierre, coldly, as he strode up and down.

"But, don't you understand! he is going to the police, and we shall be locked up in a couple of hours."

"Do you fancy that the chief of police will give a hearing to such a tag-rag? He will not get beyond the doorstep, and if he makes a row, he will be put in the cells."

Alexandre did not seem encouraged by this quietus, but objected, shaking his head :

"The police receive any stories brought them."

"Well, even if received," returned Coignard, "do you think his word will be taken? Where are his proofs? No. 8044 was drowned in Toulon harbour, and I have all the evidence of my rank. If by an impossibility an inquiry is set on foot, I shall have no trouble in establishing that I am Count de Sainte-Hélène."

"Have it your own way," replied Alexandre, far from convinced, "our game is getting queer, and it's the height of misfortune that that villain turns up in Paris. There is no time to lose in parrying his thrust."

"You are right in that, and I have a weapon for that case which has always succeeded with me. I do not shun danger but run to face it. Have the horse put to the cabriolet."

"Where are you going?"

"To General Despinois, commanding my division of the army. I mean to settle Master Darius this very day. We must foresee everything," he proceeded coolly; "in case of an explosion, I must be ready to cut and run. Get three travelling costumes ready and notify Rosa as soon as she comes home. Do not stir from here yourself till I come home. Not a word till then, either."

"Don't worry about me, but don't be rash?"

Pierre snapped his fingers like one who had braved worse perils, donned his uniform and all his decorations, and went out to execute the audacious project of checkmating the informer. A skilful move but not exempt from danger. The exceptional favour heaped upon the Count de Sainte-Hélène had created enemies in the army. His ostentation and haughty manners were not prone to regain the sympathy alienated from him by his rapid advancement. Men were on their guard with him, feared him even, and none loved him. Above all, he was the object of the jealousy of the soldiers who had gone over to the Bourbons with ardent zeal. The old soldiers of the Empire who remained Bonapartists under the Restoration, were not much astonished that Count Pontis, exiled as a nobleman of old, should break his oath to Napoleon and profit by the king's favours; but the new officers who wished by dint of devotion to blot out their past record, imperial and even republican, viewed this pet of the court awry, and divined in him a dangerous rival.

The commanding general of the division was a declared enemy of Coignard's.

General Despinois, become a nobleman, though he had marched in the peasants' wooden shoes, in one of the battalions of 1793, was a frenetic Royalist, and neglected no occasion of attracting notice. He only wanted one to get rid of a subaltern whom he detested. Coignard was in nowise ignorant of his ill-will, but his lucid mind had already coolly weighed all the chances, good and bad, of the explanation he meant to provoke.

"He will learn it sooner or later," he argued as he got into his carriage; "and as he is no lover of me, he will hasten to make a noise. But in frankly meeting him, I oblige him to institute an inquiry, and that I can end to my taste. I shall ask a private hearing of the king, and obtain a blank committal to a State prison, in the old style, to put

that scoundrel Darius where he will be kept for the rest of his days."

The count was just stepping in when an orderly trotted into the court-yard, and, saluting, asked for the lieutenant-colonel of the 72nd, for whom he had a letter.

"It is I," said Coignard, taking the official communication, and rapidly opening it.

It was the general's order for his attendance on urgent affairs at the divisional headquarters.

"Darius has outstripped me," thought Coignard. "The plot thickens. All the more reason for making haste. Alexandre," he said, "do not forget my instructions!"

Then he leaped into the vehicle, grasped the reins, and drove off to the Place Vendôme. A quarter of an hour later General Despinos's usher announced Colonel Pontis, who walked into the cabinet, where his fate would be decided, with erect head, assured gaze, and a smile on his lips. On hearing his name, the general officer rose quickly, placed himself in front of him, and said ironically:

"Count de Sainte-Hélène, you shall no longer abuse the good faith of the Government and myself. You are Pierre Coignard, an escaped convict."

XXIV

THE CLIMAX.

WITHOUT changing countenance Coignard sustained this vehement apostrophe, which he had been prepared for.

"I thank you, general, for your designation," he said, with the warmth of an injured man. "Allow me to retire and send you evidence of what I am. A dialogue cannot be maintained between us in this tone without detriment to the dignity of us both."

"Your riding the high horse will not trample on me," returned the general, exasperated by his visitor's coolness, "and before you depart you must explain yourself to a man whom you perfectly well know."

At the same time he rang and gave the order for the usher to bring in Darius. This spiteful fellow entered with the same humble mien he had adopted in other times towards the prison officials, but he darted a look of hatred upon the colonel. It was a failure. Expecting this confrontation, Coignard evinced not the faintest emotion. Addressing the general with the most untroubled serenity, he said:

"If it be on this wretch's declaration that I am expected to justify myself, I refuse to stoop to an explanation."

"Let me know why, please?" demanded the general, threateningly.

"Because this fellow came to my house this morning and I had him driven away, as I ought to do. A superior officer who faithfully serves the king, and who has the honour to be known to his majesty, does not commune with a galley-slave."

"But you have me to answer, sir," said General Despinos, "I alone command here, and I have the right to interrogate you!"

"Be it so, general," answered Coignard, after an instant's reflection. "Interrogate. I am ready to answer you personally."

"That is fortunate," said the other ironically. "In that case, sir, explain to me how it is that this man recognises in you his chain-companion, Pierre Coignard, condemned to fourteen years' penal servitude in the year IX, and escaped from Toulon prison in December, 1805."

"In 1800, the year you, I believe, call IX," replied the colonel, laying stress on the republican title which the general had employed, "I was in the service of the King of Spain, for I followed our princes abroad in 1791. In 1805 I was living with my countess in Tarragona, where my house was perfectly well known to all the nobility of the province. At that period, general, you were in Bonaparte's army, and I can well understand that you should be ignorant of the details of my early life; but they are in the knowledge of his majesty, to whose high justice I shall appeal on need."

"He a noble who fled the country! he married in Spain to a countess!" interrupted Darius. "These are lies, sir! His father was a locksmith, and his wife is most likely one Lucette, a cast-off mistress of mine who ran away to join him."

"General!" cried Coignard, as if unable to restrain his wrath, "you will not, I hope, allow a knave to insult a nobleman's lady in your presence."

"Look, look, my lord!" said Darius quickly, pointing to Coignard's agitated features, "there's the tiger grin he wore when he was angry; all our mates at Toulon know it. Just you bring some of them, and they will all tell you, as I do, that he showed that set grin after a flogging he got three days after his arrival. Strip him of his fine feathers, and you'll see the marks of Jean the executioner's whip."

Coignard bit his lips, and bitterly regretted the giving way to his fury. Soon mastering himself, he said in an emotionless tone to the general:

"This becomes unbearable, and I should break the oath I took as Chevalier de Saint-Louis if I listened any longer to such infamous language. Once more I beg your leave for me to withdraw, general; and since you attach faith to this rascal's imputations, to enable me to clear myself at the soonest possible moment before the king."

Coignard's firm attitude and truthful tone had finished by shaking General Despinos's belief, and, besides, he was beginning to give more thought to the strange affair. A mistake was serious here, for the lieutenant-colonel of the 72nd regiment was high enough placed to avenge himself on calumniators, and the commander of the first military division became much perplexed. To put an end to it, and gain time to refer to the Minister of War, he called one of his staff-officers in and gave him the order to escort Pontis home with two soldiers.

"Inasmuch as you assert possession of proofs of your identity," he said, in a somewhat softened tone, "I am affording you the means of producing them."

"I ask no more," responded Coignard, bowing formally.

"I shall wait for you, sir; but I am bound to notify you that my

aide-de-camp will not leave you until you have completely cleared yourself."

"I shall not long have the pleasure of the gentleman's company," retorted the colonel, going out with the officer.

Two troopers in the ante-chamber, at the aide-de-camp's sign, followed them at a respectful distance. On the way, whilst chatting with his guard, Coignard studied him surreptitiously. He was a grizzled veteran, whose face told of loyalty but not of over-brightness. The dashing colonel did not disdain to complain to this inferior of General Despinois's behaviour towards him, and the honest sub answered that he was persuaded of his innocence.

At the same time the cunning adventurer questioned his escort with well-feigned interest on his personal standing. He found that he had served in Spain, and that Pontis's exploits in the Arragon army, were not unknown to him. This was a link of fellowship which the colonel took care to strengthen. He multiplied his benevolent inquiries, hinted that his offices would be useful to the captain, and before arriving home, had completely won him over by his soldierly frankness and familiar good humour.

In acting thus the false count prepared for a sequel of which he began to see the necessity. He had worn an unflinching brow before the general and his enemy, but under it he doubted the final result. Only partial success had been won by his coolness, aristocratic manners, and imperturbable scorn, and he felt aware that his position would become singularly dangerous when seriously attacked. The count's cash-box contained his title-deeds, commissions and discharges, but would the mere production of papers suffice against Darius's repeated statements.

Liberated convicts abounded in Paris, so that confrontations might be multiplied, and it was to be feared that Louis XVIII's obligingness would not go so far as to cover a favourite disputing his identity with felons. Nevertheless, he still wavered, and he might have stood up against the tempest only for a thought that suddenly struck him.

"Why should I not return to Spain?" he asked himself at the Rue Basse-Saint-Denis. "When one's ship is sinking, one leaps aboard another. I can be at the frontier in three days. I have plenty of money. Rosa has been warned to be ready, and she would ask nothing better than to come with me. It is the best course."

With the quick making up of mind which he owed to his past adventures, he decided to flee immediately.

"Pray come in, my dear captain," he said to the old officer at the doorway of his mansion. "I will present you to the countess who will offer you a glass of Alicante whilst I just look up my documents."

The flattered aide-de-camp expressed his thanks, and ordered the two soldiers to stand on guard in the street. Forewarned by Alexandre of Darius's visit, Rosa was ready for any event. The presentation took place, and the countess poured out their best Spanish wine with her habitual winsomeness to the guest. In a second she had understood the state of things, and with a glance informed her lover that she would help him in his plans,

"Excuse me, captain, for time enough to run up to my study and bring down those papers."

The officer remained to chat with Rosa over the wine, and these two dainties prevented him thinking the time long. In the meanwhile, Coignard found his brother anxiously expecting him in the adjoining room.

"I believe I must be off," said he, without emotion.

"Off! whither do we go?"

"To Spain."

"Is all lost, then?"

"Not yet; but I deem it prudent not to stand the brunt, and, besides, I have had enough of the life we've been leading here. We have plenty of funds, and can cut a shine in Madrid. Society there is not so particular as in France."

"But there are soldiers at the street door!"

"Hand me your livery," said Coignard easily.

Hastening to obey, Alexandre gave up his outer garments, and even the feather duster he was holding. The transformation was executed in an instant, the ex-gaol-bird being an adept in such moultings and changes of plumage. And when he walked down the servants' stairs with a napkin on his arm, nobody would have recognised the Count de Sainte-Hélène in the lackey. Rapidly going down the steps and crossing the courtyard, Coignard passed before the two troopers, who paid no attention to him, and disappeared down the street.

By this time the officer had found the host gone long enough. He politely remarked as much to the countess, who answered him evasively. Made uneasy the captain rose, opened the next room door, found it empty, and began running all over the house. All he met were servants engaged in their duties, and the first one he questioned replied in a matter-of-fact tone:

"The count left the house three quarters of an hour ago at least, and I daresay he is a good way off."

Upset by this information, the captain rushed out without taking leave of the lady and ran into the street, where he saw nobody but the two soldiers peacefully awaiting his return. It was clear that the colonel had duped the poor captain, who had to go back chapfallen to relate his mishap to General Despinois. He rated him soundly, and sent him for a week's imprisonment at the Abbaye; but, at the same time, he applauded himself for having listened to Darius's denunciation.

The sham count's flight left no doubt as to his identity, or of the general's having moved correctly. Instead of struggling with an influential personage who might finally overcome the slander, General Despinois was sure of a success that would do great honour to his perspicacity. To rid the king and court of the impudent impostor who had stolen into their confidence was to render a service infallibly to be appreciated, and henceforward he took the matter in hand and vigorously kept it moving. He had all the more reason to do so as it came to him second-hand.

Darius, expelled from the Hôtel de Pontis, had gone to the Ministry of the Interior, then occupied by the Duke Decazes. After suffering rebuffs from hall-porters and others, he had so strongly persisted, and

made so much of the importance of the revelation he had to make, that the antechamber guards had taken it on themselves to inform the minister. He believed that it was a question of some plot against the king or the State, and gave the order for the noisy visitor to be admitted.

But when he learnt Darius's secret, he deeply regretted being the first to hear it, and hastened to shift it off upon another's shoulders with his responsibility. The keen-witted premier was too high in the royal esteem to need fresh claims on its confidence by judiciary police cases; besides he attached but slight credit to a galley-slave's accusation, and he foresaw great scandal in any case. So he seized on a very natural excuse to avoid mixing in the affair. The Count de Sainte-Hélène being a military officer, the duke sent Darius to the divisional headquarters, where he was better welcomed.

The general had demanded proof, and, after the convict had been given to eat, he offered to blast Coignard with the mere sight of him, if they would set them face to face. General Despinois could thus boast the merit of alone unmasking the sham nobleman, and he did not flag.

On his recommendation Darius was listened to at the chief police office, where, besides, he was already known as an informer. He was quickly given leave to dwell in Paris, and it was hinted that by his services he might rise to the honour of being admitted among the secret agents. To prove him, he was to help to find Coignard, a mission on which he entered with all the ardour of an old enemy. It was his life-long dream to be even with the man he had hated some five-and-twenty years, and it was a fine opportunity to realise it.

As soon as he could, the convict began his investigation by looking up all his former associates of Toulon and Rochefort who were in Paris, depending on finding some who would be willing to identify Coignard; but it was first necessary to catch the hare, and in the same circle Darius pursued his inquiries.

The false count and his congeners had made a fitting as rapid as complete. My lord, my lady and the trustworthy nobleman's gentleman had fled like phantoms; so that when the soldiers returned in force they pounced upon two or three domestics only whose dumbfounded aspect sufficiently attested their innocence. A minute search led to no important result. The drawers contained meaningless papers, and no valuables save the heavy plate which there was no time to remove. The police were therefore very much baffled at the outset, and Darius gained great merit in their eyes from his earnest endeavours to find the enigmatical object of their search. He neglected nothing to show his worth. Well paid and fed, supported by stout fellows who bolstered up his cowardice, he kept up the hunt and promised a speedy success. He had no more intelligence than courage, but he did not lack the cunning which the spy system gives its devotees, and he had the scent of the wolf for prey.

Therefore he became full-blown, a very satisfactory man-hunter.

Vidocq the thief-taker, chief of police, after having commenced his career by a forgery that brought him to the galleys, had created a school of espionage on leaving Toulon. He utilised his acquaintance with the world of rogues to reveal their habits and unveil their tricks, and he had succeeded in getting it accepted as a principle that freed

felons made the best thief-takers. He asserted that "dog would best catch dog," and Darius was warmly received under this head. Before placing him on the track though, Vidocq artfully questioned him upon the Toulon prison inmates from 1800 to 1805, Coignard's term there, and compared Darius's information with his own notes.

When the chief of police was told of the singular event which so puzzled the Home Minister and the Prefect of the Seine, he was already certain of the identity of the colonel with the galley-slave, and he offered to produce him in three days.

On the next day, in fact, a skilfully arranged ambush was laid by the house in the Rue Saint-Maur, which captured the Count and Countess de Sainte-Hélène.

Alexandre Coignard was next taken, after a stout resistance. From that day all was over with the mock nobleman. After nineteen years' adventures, often glorious and always remarkable, the son of the Langeais locksmith was again put in the dock of the court-room of the assizes of the Seine, his fate being shared by his brother and the woman he dearly loved.

The identity of the pretended count with Pierre Coignard the escaped convict was judicially declared, notwithstanding his energetic protests, and sentence was pronounced against him of hard labour for life. His brother was condemned to five years of the same penalty, but Rosa Marcen was acquitted.

When the accused were brought in to hear the verdict, the so-called Colonel de Sainte-Hélène turned on Rosa a long look wherein love still dwelt. The turnkeys dragged him away, but the Spaniard had time to catch his hand, which she pressed to her heart, and to whisper: "Hope! I love you, and I live for your sake!"

XXV.

AFTER THE DOOM.

AFTER the jury settles the fate of an accused all is ended for the sight-seers who drop into the court for a stirring sensation. But for the wretch on whom the "guilty" falls there thence unfolds a new life—one of shame and suffering, to be led obscurely in the great convict receptacles. He is no longer a man, but a number designates him whose name is blotted out, and he is blended with the swarm whom the warders control with canes.

For him who has enjoyed the pleasures of society the transition is horrifying; but he does not feel the whole extent of the horror until he is fairly within the prison hell. In an ordinary house of detention he can dream of the success of his appeal—a respite, a reduction of the term, an escape, and, besides, he cannot suspect what torments await him.

But Coignard had not even this fleeting consolation. He knew that the indisputable end had come, and his experience made him see the future in its odious reality. The plank bed, the coupling links, the bilboes and manacles—all the loathsome details of the galley-slave's

existence—were pictured to the noble officer who had figured at the court of the Eighteenth Louis: the former major of the Army of Aragon shuddered anticipately under the warder's rod.

The first idea to draw him out of his black study was suicide, and he coldly examined it. Everything urged him to die—the weight of his disgrace, the bitterness of his state, and, more than all, the void in his heart. So long as love and ambition had inflated it, Coignard had remained insensible to all griefs, superior to all circumstances. When his vivacious spirit was lashed by passion, it always bounded over all obstacles. Now that he no longer loved and hoped for nothing, he did not even try to struggle with adverse fortune. The only sentiment surviving in him was immense disgust for the stormy life he had led for twenty years. Still he intended to wait for the result of his appeal, not that he built much hope on it, but because his gambler-like superstition would not let him quit the game till the last card was turned up.

It was a wholesome delay. Other thoughts sprang up in his prolific mind to those it generally engendered. His fluctuating fancy inflamed towards good, and he said to himself that he might yet do something in the world. The prison whither he would return was filled with wretches over whom his name and the fame of his fabulous adventures would give him a marked sway. It lay with him to use that power to excite their hatred against society or improve them by his example. It was this latter course he chose, and he resigned himself to redeem his past by irreproachable conduct. When he received the rejection of his appeal by the Supreme Court, July the 31st, 1819, his conversion was complete. Already in Bicêtre prison he had shown proofs of his new intentions by preaching virtue and submission to his companions in misfortune. When the dreaded day arrived of departure for Toulon, his reputation was so firmly established that the captain of the chain gang conferred on him a kind of leadership over the rest, for which he justified his confidence.

An immense concourse had assembled at the gaol gates to see the mournful march-out, and all eyes sought for the convict colonel in the collection of culprits. His bearing never gave way for an instant, being dignified without braggadocia, and calm without meekness, so that not one insulting shout hailed his appearance. The public sympathy, turned away from the burglar and impostor noble, returned to the repentant criminal. He was pitied, and his misfortune was respected.

In all the towns they passed through there was the same mob to see the notorious adventurer, and everywhere curiosity changed to compassion. Women, above all, could not gaze without emotion on Coignard's correct and noble features, expressive eyes, and graceful figure. The secret of their tenderness may perhaps be found in the story, circulating even in the country, of his lady-killing in the upper circles. They whispered that love had a great hand in the deeds of this exceptional felon, and they pardoned him his crimes by reason of the passion inspiring them.

Besides, the cynosure had the sense not to take advantage of the interest he excited by posing as a martyr before the populace. On the

contrary, he avoided looks and questions, and when he could not, he remained modest and reserved.

His arrival at Toulon was a nine days' wonder for the prisoners. The past thirteen years had not so much changed the staff and complement that Coignard was not recognised by many of them. But, whilst the warders hastened to show their good memory by vouching to his identity, the prisoners agreed tacitly not to "tumble" to it. They greeted him with a kind of warm respect, and did not think to "chum" with him.

On the delicate point of his true personality, the ex-colonel dispensed as far as possible from taking a stand; nevertheless, when his superiors forced some answer, he always stated he was the victim of a judicial error. He simply denied he was Coignard, without flying out against the sentence he considered unjust. It seems that he had traced this undeviating plan to himself, with a persistency attributable to a lofty sentiment. He did not wish it to be certain that his colonel's epaulets were worn by an escaped galley-slave; better not to destroy a doubt, he argued, which saved the honour of the uniform.

During the early days of this new durance in Toulon, one busy thought revealed itself, and more than once the watchers saw his eyes sparkle when a woman appeared on the Arsenal quay, but he never asked leave to write and never inquired about persons he had known in society. His brother, sent to Rochefort prison, died there in a few months.

Pierre, therefore, could expect no outward help. Nevertheless he had borne away one hope from Paris, and the words Rosa Marcen had murmured as a farewell had never left his mind. He expected to see her, he relied on her, not again to help him in flight, but to bring him in her presence the courage to suffer till death should release him.

His vast hope was unmet. Rosa did not come and never wrote, and the galley-slave believed he had been betrayed by her whom he had made, or rather maintained, as Countess de Sainte-Hélène. Then a profound alteration took place in him. Gentle, resigned, submissive, he continued to be liked by officers and companions, but he no longer concealed the huge sadness overwhelming him. For whole days he would not utter one word, and he would often stand stockstill when work was suspended; staring into vacancy, and hanging his arms as if a crushing burden were upon him. The warders respected his reverie, and said in their slang, "*The penman is thinking of when he was 'sogering.'*"

In the common room, where he was the penman or public scribe, he aided his companions with his pen and his advice when they had letters home or petitions to compose. He never wrote a line on his own behalf.

Thus did twelve years go by over his grizzling head. He counted day by day, not to say hour by hour, waiting to hear from his wife who had forgotten him, or from death who would not take him. Gradually his iron health was affected, and pining undermined his supple and robust frame. Old age was come. The whilom grenadier of the Convention was nearly sixty, and he began to see the close of his sufferings draw near.

The Revolution of July, 1830, sent a wave into Toulon prison. Many changes took place in the management and numerous pardons came. Coignard was assuredly not one who could expect much from the clemency of the new Government, and, in fact, he received no attention. But towards the end of the year an order came to transfer some convicts to Brest, and to Coignard's great surprise he was comprised in the consignment to be shipped on board the transport.

It was a painful voyage, and the northern climate could but aggravate his pains. He received the orders uncomplainingly, and even went joyously towards death.

Even in our days, the sea transport of convicts to a penal colony is still a difficult operation for navy officers and a notable augmentation of hardships to the prisoners. But at a period when there were hardly any steamships, and when the internal arrangements of the vessels set apart for such a service left much to desire, a voyage, however short, was downright torture to all concerned.

Piled upon bare planks between decks, chained together by a foot-bar, deprived of air and fresh food, and forced thus to support the attacks of sea-sickness, the convicts lived in such a vitiated atmosphere that great numbers perished if the voyage was at all prolonged. On the other hand, the crew and officers, out of humour at having such a repugnant cargo, showed themselves immeasurably hard and stern towards the human "cattle." Bayonet prods and even gunshots were the common replies to the least attempts of insubordination, and rarely, indeed, was any voyage made without sanguinary collisions.

Upon one of these "floating hells," the ministerial order cast Coignard in November, 1830. He received it with resignation, as we have said, though wondering why he should be sent to Brest. Generally such transfers are not made lightly, but especially applied to incorrigible mutineers as a measure of both precaution and punishment. But the former colonel was always distinguished by gentleness and model behaviour. His name alone had an effect upon the most rebellious felons, and he was so far from being one of those that the officials wished to lose that his removal was a subject of astonishment to the governor himself.

This high and mighty personage let Coignard have an audience to announce, besides this unexpected news, that a relaxation of his penalty might follow the change. It was not desirable to grant a favour in the very establishment whence he had once escaped, and so he was sent to Brest, where indulgence could be shown without inconvenience.

Coignard thanked the governor, without in the least hoping to see his fate ameliorated. He had the presentiment of his approaching end, and he thought to himself that any pardon would come too late. So he went aboard, convinced he was the victim of some whim or blunder, and that the idea of sending him to Brest arose simply in some upper clerk's brain.

The transport for the one hundred and thirty-five convicts to be changed in residence was an old frigate, recently returned from the Algerian expedition. Her lower ports were sealed up and her only guns were on deck. Spars, worm-eaten hull, and rigging were all in a very bad condition, and needed at least a month's overhauling; but she

was considered good enough for such passengers, and she was sent to sea without careening in the dry dock or the crew being allowed to land.

Caught in the Gulf of Lyons by one of those winter gales so violent in the Mediterranean, the frigate rolled and strained without making headway. She was a bad sailer too, and this time so poorly handled that she was a fortnight reaching Gibraltar.

After twenty-three days of dreadful navigation, she arrived in the Gulf of Gascony, where a south-west squall took her on the quarter and completely disabled her. About evening of the twenty-fifth day out, it became evident that the frigate would be cast upon Penmarch Point, the south-western headland of the Breton peninsula, justly passing for the worst place on the French coast.

The officers tried yet to have some work executed that might retard the wreck or render it less destructive, but the desperate and worn-out sailors obeyed half-heartedly, and it seemed that fatality would have its full sweep of the unfortunate craft.

Already through the fog were visible masses of white surge which enshrouded the jagged black rocks; the roar of the rollers incessantly breaking upon the mournful cape came clearly through the howls of the south-wester. Each of the enormous waves rushing in under the cliffs smote it like a great gun going off, and this sound, well-known to the coast-farers, froze the convict-shipmen with dread.

Lights were seen gleaming along the rocks; on more hospitable strands help might be expected, but the manners of the savages dwelling here left no hope of that sort. Pillage alone attracted the peasants to Penmarch. They lay in wait there as a hunter chooses a feeding-place frequented by game, in hopes of a wreck to be broken up for them. Their instinct served them well. The storm blew them a certain quarry, and they sought by all possible means to hasten on the catastrophe.

The lanterns carried to and fro were to deceive the pilot, if the frigate had one, by persuading him that a vessel was safely sailing between him and the coast. They refined their infernal strategy so as to swing the lanterns slowly, as they would do aboard a rolling ship. All this rascality was superfluous, however, as the convict ship had no choice in the matter; it obeyed the helm no longer, and infallibly forged upon the triple row of reefs which defend the Breton shore. The loss was purely a question of time.

The crew had refused to do more; the officers upon the poop alone tried to work the wheel, so as to do something to clear the point, and perchance be hurled ashore in a bay which opened a few cables' length on the lee. The first lieutenant and two seamen who were not demoralised tried to keep the frigate before the wind.

The scene below was horrible. Imprecations, blasphemy, and yells of pain were intermixing in the narrow space. Several convicts had broken their chains and were hammering away at the doors. Others, prostrate on the deck, awaited death with the immobility of despair. At one end Coignard sat up to regard the terrible sight with a dry eye. He saw the ultimate moment arrive with joyfulness. He knew that nothing could save them, and he thanked heaven he was not

to die in the felon's hospital. The sea for a grave, instead of the common pit of the prison, was all the degraded colonel could desire. He feasted himself with his most brilliant memories, and imagination, great consoler of the unfortunate, revived dear forms and happy scenes.

Again he beheld himself, young and brave, at the head of his Chouans, galloping under the republican bullets with Yolande by his side; then Spain shone before him—Tarragona loomed up in flame through the smoke; the officer called the Count de Sainte-Hélène mounted to the assault, sword in hand, covered with gold and blood through the rain of lead, and the old bands of the Army of Arragon cheered the heroic nobleman. Rosa's figure came in its turn, but the galley-slave waved away the vision, and he growled, as he fell back on the slimy deck:

"Curses on her who abandoned me!"

A dreadful shock aroused the wretch out of his golden dream and saddening recollections. It was the frigate touching bottom, and it slowly slung round towards the coast.

Awful shrieks rose above the roar of the tempest; the convicts rolled down upon one another by the careening over, scrambled up and mad for the door to seek to flee the sea which poured in at a stove port-hole. The last hour had come.

XXVI.

THE WRECKERS.

THE door having given way entirely under the convicts' efforts, they rushed up higgledy-piggledy upon the deck. Their appearance was not even remarked. Clinging to the lower standing rigging, the sea men were trying to resist the furious dashes of the waves breaking in upon the vessel. The officers upon the stern were shouting orders, but the uproar drowned their voices.

It was the frightful juncture when all discipline disappears and the rule is every man for himself; the ferocious selfishness inspired by the nearness of death annuls devotion and pity.

Each wave which swept the deck carried away a bead off the human chaplet upon the ropes, without the remaining ends uttering a single call to the victims. They awaited their turn with the stupid indifference of condemned men at the foot of the scaffold where all will be executed. The bravest looked around them for a spar or hencoop to which to lash themselves, and so be tossed to the shore.

Not one durst trust to his unsupported powers and swim for it. Hampered by their severed chains, the convicts had more to fear than the mariners in the appalling transit from the wreck to the beach, yet it was the only way with any gleam of hope.

The ship had struck on a rock some cables' length from the shore and the sea would pound her to pieces in an hour's time. Better to leave the doomed wreck and trust to some blessed wave casting the bold and skilful swimmer on firm land. Among the foremost to rush upon deck after the ship's striking was the herculean convict L'excellent.

He would still have been king of the felons, only for his submitting to Coignard's influence, but he recognised no other master. The prisoners clustered round him with the natural instinct of the weak, and all eyes were turned, amid the general disorganisation, upon the one man who maintained some self-command.

He wore the green cap which denoted he was "in for life," and he did not sink below his reputation for courage and physical strength. Propping himself against the capstan on a coil of rope, he had seized a spar broken in twain by a wave, and he measured the space between him and the water, ready to jump into the first sea that came aboard and be swept away with it.

"Do like me, pals!" shouted he, above the gale.

Serried against one another to form a mass to resist the shakings, the convicts were going to leap into the water along with him, when a name circulated among the desperate knot of men.

"The count! Where's the Count de Sainte-Hélène?"

Who had uttered these words when everybody was thinking of his own avoidance of the impending death? by what strange freak had the remembrance of Coignard struck those on the brink? Perhaps the speaker had owed his life to the convict colonel in some outbreak quelled by his influence. Perhaps heaven did not will that Coignard should perish thus, reserving him for later woes, and also other joys.

"The count!" repeated Lexcellent; "the count forgotten below! No, it shall never be said that I deserted an old pal in that way!"

Leaving the capstan, the intrepid galley-slave jumped down into the hold through the open hatchway, though the waters were bubbling up. When his companions scrambled to the deck, Coignard had remained on the boards, flung against the side, whence he had not sought to drag himself to avoid the water gushing in at the port-hole. Calm and still, he looked for a larger wave than usual to flood the mid-ships and cut short his last moments. The sea did not come. The frigate was slewed round so that her hatches faced landward, and consequently the seas broke against her keel.

When the green cap appeared, he heard the convict calling for death. The deliverer arrived in time.

"Look alive, old man," shouted the burglar, "there's no time to lose if we do not mean to drink of too big a flowing bowl."

Coignard smiled grimly as he pointed to his irons.

"Don't you see I cannot move? How can I follow you?"

"I can swim well enough for the pair of us—so don't you fear. I shall carry you along."

The shan count did not speak, but a tear coursed down his hollow cheeks. His stoicism could not hold out against the devotion offered to him at the very moment when he was cursing life and his brother men. The fellow-convict's simple heroism triumphed over his despair.

"There is yet in the world a being who loves me," he murmured, trying to conceal his emotion. But then, remembering what awaited him in prison if he succeeded in escaping, he said in a firm voice: "I thank you, mate, but I would rather die here."

"Nonsense!" cried the green cap; "die in a box like this! drowned

like a rat! a pretty end for a colonel! It would never do. I shall carry you out."

He caught up his comrade in his arms like a feather, lifted him upon his shoulders and climbed upon the deck. When he arrived the ocean had almost finished its work; five or six convicts still clung to the rigging, but the others had been swept away or had plunged in.

The hull cracked beneath wind and wave, and threatened at any moment to split.

"There is only just time to push off, and here's our boat," said Lexcellent, clutching a fragment of the bulwark.

"Leave me to myself," said Coignard resisting; "you will have no chance to save yourself unless alone, and I do not care about living."

"Look here," returned the colossus decisively; "I mean to pull you through, so let me do it. If you help me all you can, I believe we shall get to land; but if you hamper me, you will get me drowned along with you, and that's the long and short of it, and the same as saying that you had best hang on my shirt, tooth and nail, and give me free swing."

Choosing the moment when a mountainous wave leaped over the gunwale, the convict allowed himself to be carried onward with his living burden upon the raft. Coignard had comprehended that he must yield if only to repay his courageous deliverer. The latter swam well, and his exceptional strength enabled him to steer the raft in some measure as the cataract hurled them towards the strand. Coignard lost his breath, and closed his eyes to meet the shock which would crush them.

But a miracle saved the pair. The wave lifted them over the sharp rocks and flung them senseless on the sands. With additional good fortune the piece of driftwood was embedded between two crags and prevented the reflux from carrying them away. In its fury the sea delights in these freaks. On opening his eyes, Coignard saw strange faces surrounding him. These men were clad in sheep and goat-skins; their long hair descended on their shoulders, and broad-brim hats shaded their brows as they busied themselves on the shingle. By the dim glimmer of lanterns carried by ragged women, the felon saw their odd shadows run down to the water-side and then up on the cliff. The meaning of their movements escaped him, and he was almost tempted to believe it was a witches' sabbath.

A sharp pain recalled him to the sad reality. The hooked nails of greedy hands were dug into his bruised flesh as the shreds of clothing upon him were torn off. The wreckers did not respect the dead, for they numbered him among them. Coignard had enough strength to utter a yell which made the birds of prey fly, and, sitting up, he saw he had his preserver by his side, also recovering consciousness.

"We are not drowned," remarked the latter, shaking himself to learn if any bones were broken.

"No, but we are not much better off," responded the second convict. "Look, and tell me if we would not have fared as well aboard."

Only for an instant scared by the voice of the dead alive, the wild horde ran upon them again, with knives between their teeth and brandished clubs. The peasant in command of the band knelt down,

and held up a lamp so as to kill them more surely. He so evidently was choosing the fittest spot for a deadly stab that Coignard coldly stared at him in his preparations. The green cap, fallen back exhausted, swore at the cut-throats and insulted them.

At the very moment when the ex-colonel turned to give his comrade a farewell glance, the Breton dropped his knife, and began to harangue his fellows animatedly in a language the shipwrecked pair did not understand. The others listened eagerly, but by the tone of the replies from several, it was easy to guess that they objected to their principal's proposal. Still kneeling between the convicts, the peasant multiplied his words and gestures. He pointed to Coignard's waist and feet, and indulged in so grotesque a pantomime that the older convict said, only half in jest :

"Colonel, I believe they are going to eat us raw, and are selecting the dainty bits beforehand."

The other sadly shook his head, for he had more clearly divined. These tigers in human form had perceived that the waifs wore the galley-slave's chain, and a greedy thought had checked their murderous arms. A prisoner captured was paid for with a hundred francs, a tariff for human flesh well-known by all natives of Finisterre. There was no specification how the taking was to be made, and nothing excepted as regarded shipwreck. Therefore the scoundrels could share two hundred francs, forty silver crowns, if they carried the two prizes to the police at Pont-Labbé. There was one objection, which the wreckers debated. By sparing the two felons, they ran the risk of being accused of luring the frigate ashore and dividing the spoil among them. But the man with the knife managed to demonstrate this was an absurd fear, inasmuch as galley-slaves would not be believed, and that, besides, the new Government would not vex the coast people, already only too eager to rebel. Hence the majority decided to keep the castaways for their profit, and consequently they were dragged up the strand to the foot of the cliff, and there left under the guard of two fine young lads who were offering up their gratitude for heaven having sent their parents such good spoil.

The collection began. The unfortunate convicts, all night long, had to witness the hideous spectacle of the savages stripping the dead bodies, as they were tossed ashore, of their jewellery and clothes. Of crew and convicts not one seemed to have escaped the catastrophe, and when the dull, foggy daylight came, it fell upon the dead alone. They were piled up naked under a rock, seamen and officers confounded, and the felons alone distinguishable from the fragments of chain on their legs and bodies.

The equality of death would consign the lamentable remains of the honest and the criminal to the everlasting repose together.

During this ghastly night, Coignard had not ceased to suffer atrocious pangs. His limbs were cruelly torn by the cobblestones, an intense cold benumbed his almost nude body, and an ardent thirst parched his mouth. He asked again and again for drink, but as his captors did not understand French, or would not put themselves out for a galley-slave, he could not obtain a drop. More robust and less injured than his companion, the other took the best care he could of him,

and covered him with his own woollen shirt to warm him ; he hugged him in his arms as a mother might her child, so that he saved his life a second time by preserving him from the cold.

The dim sun had lit the scene about an hour when the pillagers prepared to quit it. Their number was augmented by some frightful haridans who had led up long yellow-haired horses, thin and unkempt, created for bearing witches to diabolical trysts. The booty was piled into their panniers, and the boniest one was reserved for the two castaways. Coignard could barely rise ; if the other had not kept him on before him like a bag he would have fallen off a dozen times. The procession crossed deserted heaths, as if towards a lonely steeple. No doubt they intended to surrender their prisoners there, for before reaching that spot the laden horses were led off in various paths, so that only a few were left to convoy the two to the village.

At the corner of a wood skirting the road, and where a hollow way crossed that leading to the church, a man suddenly appeared who made a deep impression on the escort. They tried to get out of his way, but it was too late ; the new-comer perceived them and he called them imperiously. Yet he seemed a mere peasant riding a native pony ; but his fine cloth suit, silk banded hat, and gaiters carefully buttoned over green velvet breeches, announced a personal care and a comfort very rare thereabouts.

The prisoners could not make head or tail of the conversation in vulgar Breton patois, but they understood it hinged on them, for the rider pointed several times to them with his whipstock, and it seemed that he questioned them about them. They answered timidly, and faltered excuses.

The result was that the train changed its direction from the village into the hollow road, following the mounted man, who took the lead.

"Tis the mayor of the place who claims the glory of handing us over to the gendarmerie," observed green cap to Coignard. "They will make short work of us."

But the little party went farther and farther from inhabited tracts, through a large forest, till finally they went down through a deep gorge, at the end of which rose a little castle, flanked by two turrets covered with ivy. The leader rode straight up to this bit of olden-times' architecture, and set the bell jingling vigorously.

"This does not look like a gendarme barracks or a lock-up," said L'excellent. "Where the deuce are they putting us?"

A young and pretty servant maid, neatly dressed, came to open the door, to whom the man in gaiters said a few words, still in the unknown tongue, whereupon she ran in-doors.

A brief dialogue began then between the wreckers who led the horse and the intervener, which ended in an act which filled the two felons with the deepest amaze. The rider took a plump leather bag from his belt, counted out some silver to the landsharks, and dismissed them with a wave of the hand which permitted no reply. It was plain that he had paid the prisoners' ransom, but the reason for this completely puzzled those most interested. At the end of conjectures, the elder convict concluded to alight from the yellow-maned horse, and took Coignard off in his arms, as he had no power yet to stand up alone.

The stranger beckoned him to follow him with his burden, which he did through a long passage to a door which he threw open.

On seeing the unaccustomed sight presented, the ex-burglar was so astounded that he let his comrade slide to the floor. At the other end of a nicely-furnished room stood two beds, with sheets and quilts of dazzling whiteness. Near each couch of luxury a thoughtful hand had placed a table, with bottles more likely by their shape to contain wine than toast-and-water. A clear fire burned in a broad chimney-place, and thick curtains softened the daylight that came in. Everywhere was revealed that intelligent care for material life which is called comfort in our days, and an observer would have perceived at the first glance that none but a woman could have presided over such dainty arrangements.

To the convicts this appeared a nook in Paradise, and they wondered what singular adventure had brought them into fairyland. The Hercules, who had so many years slumbered on the plank bed, stared in stupor at the soft pillows and fresh linen, without any idea that the delicious couch could be for him. Coignard, enfeebled by pain, had vague ideas of the truth, though with no power to reflect on the strange situation.

Their guide, standing at the door, pointed to the beds and the bottles so evidently awaiting guests.

"Do you mean to say they are for us?" timidly stammered the older convict.

Either from not comprehending, or it not suiting him to reply, the man merely repeated the gesture, it becoming clear that he wished to play the part of those mute servants who obey the genii of the "Arabian Nights."

"All right, then ; if there's a blunder, so much the worse for you," said green cap, making up his mind. "First thing, in I pop the colonel, and then I shall luxuriate between the sheets like the governor himself. I have a long time been dreaming of a snooze in a real genuine bed, and I tell you fair, that if you wish to turn us out of doors you will have all the work you want to wake us up."

After this emphatic monologue, the convict gently put his companion on one of the beds, and set to removing the remnants of clothes which the wreckers had left. No doubt satisfied to see his intention was understood, the guide nodded approvingly and went out, closing the door after him.

"Oh, of course, don't forget to lock us up !" muttered green cap, on hearing the key turning in the lock on the other side. "It seems that we are free to go to sleep, but not to go away."

But this did not prevent the veteran of the galleys from profiting by the blessing befallen them. He finished undressing Coignard, who submitted like a child, made him swallow a glass of excellent Malaga, of which he emptied the bottle at a draught, placed him between the sheets, covered him up, and tucked him in, and finally took possession of the other bed with marked satisfaction. Five minutes afterwards the pair were sleeping soundly, overcome by the leaden slumber following great physical commotions.

XXVII.

THE NOOK IN EDEN.

WHEN Coignard opened his eyes the next morning, sunshine filled the room; they had slept four-and-twenty hours. The so-called Count de Sainte-Hélène had some difficulty to explain the past. Habituated to meet the dark prison walls and his chain-companions' hideous faces, his looks wandered with astonishment on the clear beams gaily striping the chamber. He believed it was all a dream, and closed his eyes till another strange sensation aroused him.

Suppressed voices exchanged words by his bedside in a tongue well-known, which awakened a world of memories. At first he fancied he was deluding himself, and that the dialogue was in the Celtic idiom of which he knew so little, but, on listening more attentively, he recognised sentences and phrases. Beyond mistake, Spanish was being spoken.

"Do you think the señora will remain long away?" questioned a woman's voice.

"Who can tell?" answered some man. "Since the confounded revolution last year madame has never had a week's repose."

"That's true, and the more's the pity," rejoined the woman. "We were so happy here before the troubles. But what an idea to meddle with politics, when rich and free as she is!"

"When one bears the name of Kervan, one owes everything to the king," returned the masculine voice solemnly.

"All I hope is that no evil will befall her," continued the woman sadly.

"What can happen to her, my dear Teresa? For twenty miles around the country people worship our mistress, and there is no official dare visit her with rebuke. The whole neighbourhood would rise."

"You are right, Antonio. She is so good! Yet I am always in fear when tramps are hidden here, and even more dangerous folk sometimes," added the woman, lowering her tone.

"For that matter, had I been consulted—but, in short, Master Alannic knows what he is about, and he probably had his orders. Besides, you are well aware that no unfortunate person can go by without being helped."

"Yes, but when they are—are galley-slaves?" said the Spanish woman, hesitating to utter the word.

"Pooh!" responded Antonio, "all are not rogues who are put in irons. I was myself condemned to the *presidios* in 1820, by the Liberals, and if I had not run away to France —"

An abrupt movement of Lexcellent, who began to awaken, interrupted the dialogue. The woman called Teresa rose briskly, went up to the bedside, and asked if she could do anything for him in fair French, but with a strong Spanish accent. Her voice was sweet, and without being remarkable her features wore an astonishing expression of intelligent kindness. Stupefied by so much attention, the felon

stammered some unintelligible words. Coignard came to the rescue by thanking their nurse fervently.

"We are unfortunate wretches who hoped for nothing more in this world, when God led us hither. May we learn to whom we owe such benefits?"

He took care to speak French, not wishing the household should know he understood Spanish.

"The mistress of this domain, Madame de Kervan; what she commanded us to do for you she commands for all in need."

"We shall bless her all our lives," pursued the convict; "but what can we do to prove our gratitude?"

"Master Alannic, the steward, will better explain than we what our mistress expects of you. At present, go on resting and recovering your strength. My husband will relieve me till my watch comes round again," she said leaving the apartment.

But the Spaniard soon considered he might as well leave the two patients to rise unattended, and he went to join his wife.

The galley-slaves' astonishment was so great that it was some time before they could communicate their impressions.

"What do you think of this set-out?" queried green cap, unable to restrain his delight.

"That heaven has rewarded you for having come back after me between decks," answered the other laconically, ere he relapsed into thought.

He shared his comrade's surprise, but his reflection went farther. From his knowledge of society and experience of men, he sought for a satisfactory explanation to the adventure without finding any. Hospitality comprising even felons, and given by a lady whose name and opinions ranked her high in a religious and royalist province, the refuge offered to chance comers, such prodigious deeds of universal charity perplexed him. When the sound of the Castilian tongue struck his ears, for a second it occurred to him that incredible chance had brought him under Rosa Marcen's roof, but that fancy quickly vanished when the name of Kervan allowed him not even a vague hope of finding his countess. By dint of examining the situation on all sides, he arrived at the least unreasonable conclusion of all; that the lady of the manor was active politically, and recruited soldiers for the cause of the legitimate king, who counted numerous adherents in Brittany. Probably she disdained no recruits, not even galley-slaves, and he rejoiced if this was the key, and if this chance, of all chances that could be sent him, should be the happiest of all. To fight and be killed in action, whatever side he was on, was still the dream of the degraded colonel, and he felt able to take the field, old and broken though he was. He communicated this hope to his companion who hailed it enthusiastically.

"If there be any fighting going on, I am ready," said the strong man of Darius's band; "and if you get your epaulets back, I may win the stripes."

Their gladness was checked by the coming of the man in gaiters, who was the steward Alannic. He gravely and coldly explained that his mistress had ordered him to help and protect against the wreckers all castaways upon that fatal coast. He made no allusion to the social

brand on the guests, or to his mistress's political projects. He merely gave out that when the pair were sufficiently well, they were free to go or stay, which they liked. If to go, he would supply them with means; if to stay, they would get work on the property, on condition they did not show themselves at the village.

The Count de Sainte-Hélène was confounded with astonishment. Without stating his choice, he heartily thanked Alannic; and, to learn something about the mistress, inquired if he had not also a master.

"Madame is a widow," replied the steward curtly.

As Coignard went on to say he would like the pleasure of thanking her personally, he added as tersely:

"Madame will be here in three days."

These days were the happiest in Coignard's life. He enjoyed the bodily comfort so long denied him, and a more highly-valued one—to wit, absolute calmness of mind. The past was a nightmare, and the future had no ills for one who had sounded the depths of affliction. He regretted and feared nothing in the world, and hoped no more.

The warlike aspirations to which he had temporarily given way died after his conversation with Alannic. He reckoned no more of renewing guerilla life, and he would have been contented to work out his time obscurely on the Kervan estate. The ordinary activity of his mind was concentrated in curiosity as regarded the lady of this enchanted castle. Was this fairy hostess young? was she fair? by what chance had she Spanish servants? what heart-sorrow had driven her into this solitude? what misdeed was she trying to redeem by scattering boons? These were questions for himself, since he dared not question others. He spent the two days after the wreck in isolation, too; the Spaniard brought him food and his wife tidied up the room, but they continued to be quite reserved even in their conversation. The convalescents had full liberty to walk about a large garden, and freely exercised it. L'excelleat could not contain himself for gladness; he had never had such a holiday. He ate his fill, drank more than was good for him, and smoked innumerable pipes, thanks to the gardener having supplied him unstintedly. The powerful bully had become the gentlest and most devoted of men. His nature, perverted by crime and the prison cruelties, resumed its inclination towards good. Proper treatment revived proper tendencies. He spoke of nothing but showing the kind lady that he was no ingrate, and pestered Coignard to point out a way of paying his debt of gratitude.

On the second evening, the pair lengthened their promenade to the end of a long avenue of lindens closing the garden in with a thicket. Here the wood grew on uneven ground, down to a broad but shallow watercourse. A thorn hedge alone protected the grounds on that side, and nothing was easier than to go in or out unperceived. This absence of defences was accounted for by the primitive habits of that part, and the sympathy the proprietress inspired. Nevertheless, Coignard remarked the unguarded opening.

"If our enemy came this way to take us, we should be caught like rabbits in the burrow," he said.

"Tut!" answered green cap, carelessly, "what the deuce are

you worrying about? Those coast savages have pocketed our head-money, and at Brest we are believed to have gone down with the others."

"Four hundred francs are twice as much as two hundred, and the Bretons know how to reckon."

"Bless me, are there police around here?" exclaimed L'excellent, simply. "'Pon my word, I never thought of it."

"More than ever because there are so many rebels, and I advise prudence."

"That's easy enough, for we never see anybody here. I have not spoken to anybody since yesterday but a townsman who passed along here and gave me a light for my pipe."

"A townsman, you say! what was he like?" demanded Coignard, less at ease than the speaker.

"Like all his sort, of course—a sharp old chap, with a weasel face, in green velvet knee-breeches, a cocked hat, and carrying a cane. I daresay he is the schoolmaster of that village the church belongs to over there."

"Did he say anything to you?" went on Coignard, becoming moody.

"Oh, yes; he wanted to know if the Dame de Kervan had got back yet."

"In French?"

"Of course. You know I do not know the jabber of these wild men here."

"If he did not address you in Breton, it's because he saw you did not belong here."

"Well, what of it?"

"It is not well that it should be known there are two strangers here. Brest is not far off, and there are inquisitive people in Brest."

"Oh, the chap who spoke to me did not come from so far, and he is not a prison warder, I'll bet."

"All the same, I would rather I had seen him myself to make me easier," said the convict, more and more pensive.

Whilst talking, the two had gone through the thicket, and came out on the rivulet bank bounding the promenade that way.

"Speak of the —ahem! there's the old fellow now coming round the wood," cried green cap, suddenly.

Coignard, turning his head quickly, perceived in a path above the meadow on the other side of the water a person whose dress and appearance exactly answered his associate's description. He was a remarkably tall, strong man, bowed by age, who walked with a singular sliding step. His clothes were something between those of the countryman and small farmer, nothing about him defining his social standing. He might as well be a farmer pretty well to do as the mayor or lawyer of some village.

Notwithstanding the distance—some forty feet—Coignard had noticed all the points about him, and instinctively shrank back, the stranger seeming so suspicious to him at first sight. But the promenader, coming on with lowered head and eyes downcast, had also perceived the two galley-slaves, for he turned out of the path and crossed the mead to the river bank in order to accost them, evidently. It was too

late to elude the meeting, and Coignard deemed it safest to show a brave front. Besides, invincible curiosity urged him to examine this dubious character near at hand. He scented danger, and he always rose to meet it.

When the new-comer got within earshot, he politely lifted his hat and uttered a "Good day, sirs," in a clear voice and good French. In doing so, he discovered his full face, and Coignard was struck by the odd expression. Though wrinkled and bony, it offered nothing repulsive at first glance, but soon the annoyingly restless clear grey eyes, and the perpetual contraction of the thin lips, revealed a tendency to dissimulation.

"A police agent or the village money-lender?" queried the convict.

Beyond this instantaneous judgment the man had given him a vague impression of previous acquaintance. Too many adventures bristled on his road for him to recall exactly when and where; but the stranger's eyes were like stars that had shone on him in a cloudy time. To make this clearer, he opened the conversation:

"Your servant, sir. Did you want anything of us?"

"Nothing more than the latest news about Madame de Kervan, my good sir," was the answer, in a natural tone.

This ordinary inquiry was evidently a trap, and Coignard replied evasively.

"Madame is not yet returned, but will be home to-morrow," he said tranquilly.

"You have not been long here, have you?" was the direct question, to which an answer had to be immediate.

"We came over from Nantes about three days ago to paint the hall and madame's rooms whilst she was away," said the colonel, without wincing.

This haphazard explanation was borne out by the garments given the felons being full trousers, blouses, and fancy caps, such as house-painters might wear.

"Oh, you come from Nantes? How did you get round—by sea?"

"By sea," responded Coignard, after a slight pause.

The interview was becoming dangerous, and it was full time to end it.

"I say, mate," he said to Lexcellent, "as you have smoked your pipe out, we'd better be going in. You know work is waiting. Excuse us, sir," he added to the old man, lifting his cap and turning to the house.

The other returned the salute and remounted the bank, calling out with what the convict took to be irony:

"Glad to see you again!"

The two convicts went up the linden avenue rapidly, the younger absorbed in conjectures which he did not impart to his companion. The apparently inoffensive meeting deeply disquieted him, and he was eager to learn about the dangerous stranger. Believing he could not do better than address steward Alannic, he went to find him in the stables, where he was superintending the grooming of three English bays, very unlike the native horses. The major-domo received the

galley-slave formally, but he listened with attention to the tale, and frowned at the description.

"That's the mayor of Kerity," he repeated several times with a worried air. This told Coignard nothing, but he did not press for the name.

"Come with me," said the steward, conducting the two fugitives to an isolated building at the end of the yard. This dilapidated structure had originally lodged the farm servants, but it now held the farming utensils, and the upper floor was a hay-loft.

"In case of surprise, here is your hiding-place," he observed.

"Do you think that our descriptions are circulated?" asked Coignard timidly. "In that case, had we not better be off not to injure Madame de Kervan?"

"Madame will be here to-morrow, and she will decide," rejoined Master Alannic drily. "Until then, best be on the safe side."

All this set Coignard thinking, and looking at the state of things as it was: a widow lady of the manor, rich, probably with a grief on her heart, showing the widest and most unconsidered hospitality; a steward and servants devoted to their mistress, lending themselves to her charitable whims without approving them; a petty functionary, jealous of the lady, and prying about for an occasion to injure her. Comprehending all this, a singular phenomenon took place in the felon.

In other days his first thought would certainly have been to struggle against his unknown protectress's enemies, with a future of love and fortune after the victory. But his nature was absolutely changed. Ambitious views were displaced by honourable sentiments, and he said immediately that he had no right to harm a woman to whom he owed liberty. He resolved to quit the dwelling where he had been so generously received, to save it from a police search, and deliver the inmates from his dangerous presence.

It was a decision as courageous as meritorious, for he would leave a charming rest to scour the highway, and the flight, however prompt and wary, would, in all likelihood, end in a capture. It needed heroism to confront this chance of return to prison in a light spirit, but Coignard did not flinch. That same evening the two galley-slaves were again in the cosy bed-room, where they had tasted unhopèd-for delights during three days, when the ex-colonel broached the grave question of departure. He needed all L'excellent's obedience and devotion to propose spontaneously renouncing the sweet life chance had afforded them.

But Coignard knew his man, and how to play on his heart-strings. The old convict had just emptied a bottle of delicious wine, and was basking before the fire over his pipe, in that physical beatitude which disposes one to generous sentiments. The colonel judged it the moment to invoke them.

"To prove your gratitude to her you call the kind lady, what would you do?" he inquired bluntly.

"Do!" echoed the other in enthusiasm. "In the first place, I'd risk my neck, and rather twice than once; next, I would wring the necks of any of her neighbours who were not friendly, and, besides, I'd—I'd—but I do not see clearly what I can do."

The strong man could not think of showing gratitude save by receiving or administering fisticuffs. Coignard shook his head, and said in a sad, serious tone :

"The lady does not need your muscle, and you would do her an ill-turn by picking quarrels hereabouts."

"Well, I have another idea," said the old felon, briskly ; "I will work for her. I am no delver or ditcher, that's true, but I will learn ; and I am still powerful enough to cut out the work for two or three of the wild men here."

"There are plenty of labourers and gardeners on the estate," returned Coignard, "and you are not needed to cultivate the earth."

"But how can I make myself useful ?" whined the green cap.

"By leaving this place," was the colonel's tranquil reply.

"Leaving ! are you mad ? Leave, when we are lodged and feasted like princes ? Leave, when our noble selves were redeemed and brought here ? Why, the lady would think we turned up our noses at her good things."

"Maybe so ; but if we remain, she will consider us sneaks."

The old felon stared at his comrade, dazed, not understanding in the least.

"Look here," said Coignard, who saw the time come for the finishing stroke. "We were harboured here by order of the saintly lady, who offers charity without reckoning the consequences. It was enough that we were needy and shipwrecked. We have not been asked if we were galley-slaves, but the fact was noticed, and the family servants follow their mistress's instructions with regret. Now they fear they will be denounced and their mistress endangered."

"What ! do you believe we shall cause her an injury ?" queried the Samson of burglary, staggered in his confidence.

"More than belief ; I am sure of it. The lady busies herself with politics, and the authorities are hostile to her. If two felons are found under her roof she will be prosecuted. Judge now if we can honourably dwell here."

"But nobody is going to denounce us," muttered LExcellent, with a regretful gaze on the snug chamber and the appetising supper.

"It's been done even now," said Coignard coldly.

"By whom ?"

"By that old man who gave you a light so obligingly. He's some old acquaintance of mine. At present I daresay the soldiery are coming to search the manor-house."

"Then we will have to sling our chains elsewhere to-night," sighed the convict ; "or suppose we hook it at daybreak ? at least we'll have another whole night's doze. Lord ! how jolly a fellow does sleep here !"

"The sleep would cost you dear ! We must be on the tramp in half-an-hour."

"Where to ?" moaned the convict, not so easily decided to leave the snugger.

This question hit the weak spot in Coignard's project. In fact, he had no course laid down ; to get away was the main thing. He left the destination to chance. He even accepted the eventuality of being

arrested, so long as it were not under his benefactress's roof. Yet he had to give his comrade some sort of an answer.

"We shall make for Nantes, and walk in the night alone. I hear there are rebel bands in Morbihan, where we can earn our bread, I daresay. I know how they identify 'brothers' in that part, for it cannot have much changed since the year VIII of the Republic."

This prospect of hard knocks overcame the Hercules.

"It's a go," said he, pouring out a bumper of brandy; "it's a shame, though, for it's a capital inn to put up at; but since we must budge, let us go wherever you like."

The marching preparations did not take long. The clothes given them were well calculated not to attract attention on the road. With a walking staff and knapsack a-piece they would pass for workmen on the tramp from town to town.

"May a fellow carry a drink for the road?" inquired Lexcellent, to whom it came hard to part with the beverages to which he had become accustomed.

Coignard tried to prohibit a pleasure which would have an inconvenient result, but he reflected that they might also need a stimulant now and then, and he consented to his companion's filling up a flask with brandy. Before departing the felon remembered what name he had borne, and he would not go without thanking the good lady. He meant to take leave in fine style, and wrote:

"MADAME,—Two wretched men who owe life to you, bless you on quitting your house. Whatever may happen to them, your name will never be uttered. In their hearts alone your generous hospitality will be cherished. They beseech you to pray for them.

"COUNT HENRI PONTIS DE SAINT-HÉLÈNE."

For nothing in the world, would he have signed his farewell with his real name. He folded up the note, addressed it to Madame de Kervan, and left it upon the table. This done, the two, equipped for the road, slipped noiselessly out of the room and through the garden to enter the wood by the brook.

It was two hours after dark, and splendid moonlight silvered the tree-tops distant. The sky was perfect in purity, but the meadows were hidden under an opaque fog rising from the stream like a long grey veil. Coignard had already studied the land cursorily, and he intended, after crossing the thicket on the north of the manor, to make straightway for the sea, and keep along the coast as a sound limit. They advanced softly, avoiding the dry twigs as much as possible, in order not to awaken the house inmates. People go to rest early in Brittany, and not a light shone at any window.

The profound stillness was only disturbed by the night-birds' calls to one another from the castle turrets to the old forest trees. It was a night sent for fugitives. Coignard, in front, reached the end of the lime-tree avenue, and was going to walk into the mead when he stopped abruptly and laid his hand on his follower's arm to stop him. Through the mist, veiling the wood, he had seen something glitter in the moonshine. With the presence of mind never abandon-

ing him in crises, he glided behind a large tree and remained motionless as itself, on the watch. His mate took the cue and did not utter a word,

The mist was on the move ; it rolled away in patches and then formed a mass again. In a few seconds, Coignard, anxiously peering through these gaps, started in painful surprise. Over the rivulet he distinctly descried a gendarme's laced hat and carbine.

Doubt was not possible ; their arrest was projected. A quarter of an hour's delay would have ruined them. Their sole chance of safety now was in turning back and trying to flee through the yard. The colonel squeezed his companion's arm tightly, pointed to the untimely apparition with the other hand, and dragged him away cautiously towards the house.

"If the gates are only open, we shall do," he muttered as they stole along like wolves.

In a minute they were in the yard, but at one glance Coignard gave up all hope. Behind the closed gates the moon shone on a group where bayonets gleamed.

The house was surrounded.

"Come," hissed Coignard.

In the midst of his vexation he remembered the isolated building Master Alannic had shown him, and he slipped along the shadowed wall. He was a past master in the art of skirting walls and pitching on hiding-places, and the burglar, spite of his bulk, was no bad hand at it. So they completely succeeded in eluding all eyes and reaching the refuge. The door was open and the two stepped into the store-room of farm implements and empty barrels. By the twilight, Coignard made an inspection which showed that there was no concealment for two men.

A ladder staircase led into the loft, which the leader climbed, and up which he beckoned his friend to follow him. The loft was full of trusses of hay into which they burrowed, covering themselves over thickly till it was impossible to find them unless the whole was turned over.

At the very moment of their settling down, they heard the gate-bell ring. It was the visitors. The very fact of their ringing was almost a favourable token, as it proved they were invading Madame de Kervan's house with formality, and would search with strict legality. If they had wished to enter by brute force, they might have done so easily through the open garden. To come in by the gate was a proof of regularity.

"It is an official search, and it must be the mayor leading the gendarmes," observed Coignard.

"The mayor ! what mayor ?" asked the astonished convict.

"The little old man who gave you a light. A pretty conflagration he has kindled. This comes of entering into conversation with strangers."

The Hercules would have retorted, but the other imposed silence, being desirous of hearing what was said in the court-yard.

The whole household had been roused by the ring, the steward the first. A glance through the blinds informed him what was going on.

As he expected something of the sort, he did not lose his head, but briefly issued his orders in consequence.

"Antonio, go and open the gate—but do not hurry yourself. Take all the time you can to cross the yard, and bungle with the key in the lock. While you receive those gentry, I will pack off the vile birds that cause us this annoyance."

So saying, the steward hastened to the galley-slaves' room, proposing to guide them to the hay-loft. His surprise was extreme to find it empty. The beds were not touched, and the fire was still alight. It was probable that the dangerous guests had fled; but Alannic was still wondering whither they had gone, when he spied the note on the table. It was not sealed, and the gravity of the crisis justified indiscretion. Rapidly scanning the farewell of the galley-slave, he uttered a sigh of relief.

"We are deuced lucky to be clear of them. But why the mischief does a felon sign himself Count de Sainte-Hélène?" muttered the major-domo, not conversant with the famous trials of Paris. "Bah, it's no business of ours!" he added, philosophically. "The principal point is that our gaol-birds are well off, and I can laugh at the gendarmes. Now, then, Mr. Mayor, I am ready to tackle you."

Pocketing the note, he tranquilly went down into the court-yard. Antonio had faithfully carried out his instructions, and the inopportune visitors had hardly more than come through the gateway before Master Alannic appeared, grave and majestic.

The party consisted of a dozen foot soldiers, commanded by a lieutenant, with a personage at the head whose tricoloured scarf of office sufficiently paraded him as a commissary of police or a mayor. No doubt the steward knew the man well, for he accosted him by name with perfect ease.

"Is it you, Master Goueznou?" he said, in feigned surprise.

"As you see, Master Alannic," responded the official, gently. "I hope we are not disturbing you?"

"You know that we receive callers at any time," answered the other, calmly; "but I must own that I never expected the mayor by night, and in such a numerous company."

"I was going to tell you that I only come by order of the prefect."

"What order?" demanded Alannic, coldly.

"You have not now to learn that the country swarms with rebels and even escaped galley-slaves," replied the mayor, with marked hesitation; "and troops have been sent to Kerity to scour the country. I had a letter from Quimper to put myself at the disposal of the lieutenant making the search."

"And you thought to begin with Kervan Manor? Very naturally, Master Goueznou, and madame will be highly flattered with the opportunity to offer hospitality to brave soldiers," said the steward, with ironical coolness.

"It is not that I believe Madame de Kervan capable of colleaguery with enemies of the Government," the mayor hastened to retort, disconcerted by the other's calmness, "but, you see, these rogues would not ask leave to steal into a house, and——"

"To the point!" interrupted Alannic. "You come to search the

house. I am ready to show you round. Where would you like to commence?"

Goueznou bit his lips, in no haste to answer. He began to fear he had come too late, though his information was precise, to say nothing of his having seen the two fugitives that same day with his own eyes.

"They must be stowed away here somewhere," he reasoned, "in a place this knave Alannic believes safe; but I will rout them out, though I have to live on the premises."

During these reflections, the lieutenant showed fretfulness. Little flattered by the duty, he was in a hurry to get done with it. The keen steward perceived how things stood with half an eye.

"Lieutenant," he politely said, "I am at your orders. Madame de Kervan, my mistress, would never forgive me keeping you outside for long. The nights are chilly, and we keep good fires indoors."

Without more heed to the mayor, he ushered the officer up to the house. Charmed at the work getting on, the latter posted some of his men about the courtyard and followed Alannic with the rest, the mayor pitifully tailing on to them, and ruminating how to catch the steward tripping.

The search began, and went on thoroughly. Alannic insisted on opening the smallest clothes-presses, and took the searchers down into the cellar. He did not ignore the outhouse and its hay-loft, being so sure that the galley-slaves were in the woods miles off by this time. The mayor, the lieutenant, and soldiers nearly trod on the objects of their scrutiny without suspecting how near they were. Nothing at all out of the way was discovered.

Still, Goueznou noticed that there was a fire burning in the double-bedded room, supper on the table, and so on, but Master Alannic, reading his suspicions, quietly said that two of his mistress's relations were coming over from Vannes as her escort, and would be lodged here.

"Talking of staying here overnight," he subjoined, naturally, "would these gentlemen like to stay here themselves? It will be late to get back to Kerity."

The lieutenant thanked him warmly, considering him a fine, hearty soul who had been wrongfully accused of housing criminals. He was not insensible to the prospect of spending the night in a good bed, and Goueznou, who had his plans, did not seem averse to accepting. Meanwhile the inspection was concluded by a look round the gardens. The gendarmes in the meadow were called in over the brook, and this completed the steward's persuasion that his guests had got away long before the soldiers came. The house having been surrounded, and their not being found, they must have anticipated the visit. Entirely sure on this head, Alannic the more warmly insisted on the visitors sleeping there. He very much wished to convince the mayor that his spying was fruitless, and he trusted that the lieutenant, if well treated, would report favourably to his superiors.

The hospitality was accepted. The soldiers were to lodge in the outbuildings, and the steward himself pointed out the hay-loft as most comfortable. The lieutenant set to work at once to install his men

there, in the ground floor, whilst the gendarmes were given the loft. In an hour the manor wore its usual aspect again.

The mayor and lieutenant occupied the double-bedded room, without suspecting that they took the place of their game. The linesman, after doing honour to the abundant eatables, went to sleep. And the gendarmes, having had their shares, sprawled on the bundles of hay, but not before the corporal, a wary fellow, who had imbibed more than moderately by the way, gave himself the pleasure before he went to repose of thrusting his sword into the hay several times, because a good soldier always sounds the river before fording. Whilst tossing the heap about, he fancied he heard a smothered groan, but his men, ready to drop with weariness, protested so energetically against his spoiling the bed that he gave up his idea, and finally snored away with the best of them.

XXVIII.

THE CONFLAGRATION.

DAY had not broke, and everybody was asleep, when Master Alannic was awakened by a peculiar whistle, three times repeated. The signal being familiar, the steward dressed hastily and ran down into the garden to welcome his mistress. It was thus Madame de Kervan signalled herself, and she it was returning early from her journey. She had ridden through the wood and over the brook to avoid going round by the gate and ringing. Soaked with dew and torn by thorns, her habit denoted a long ride, and her black horse seemed exhausted.

A Breton peasant, in a sheepskin jacket, was her squire, and had galloped along with her on a native pony. He had hastened to alight and help his mistress down. When the steward reached the porch, he found the lady lashing the wind with her whip, in an impatience attributable to the wetness of the night.

Alannic excused himself for keeping her waiting, and hurriedly led her to the room on the first floor, where a good fire was burning. Madame de Kervan went up to it gladly, flung off a broad-brimmed felt hat that had partly hidden her face, and stood before the fireplace with that satisfaction felt by reaching home after a painful journey.

"Well, my old friend, any news while I have been away?" she asked.

"A great deal, unfortunately, madame, and I am doubly happy at your return as your presence is necessary."

"What has happened?" inquired she, with slight uneasiness.

"To begin with, that wretch Goueznou has been up to his dirty tricks. He brought the gendarmes and red breeches down upon us for a search."

The lady of the castle smiled scornfully, and remarked tranquilly:

"Nothing better. He will reap no result, and he will not dare to come, by-and-by, when we are harbouring friends."

"So I thought, but it's been a narrow squeak."

"How so?"

"I brought in two wretched men who were wrecked on Penmarch coast, and it's a wonder the mayor did not find them here."

She flourished her whip carelessly.

"Madame does not yet know that these men were part of a consignment of convicts, which the shipwrecked frigate was taking to Brest. I had it in my mind how madame once housed two escaped galley-slaves, pursued by all the people, and I thought I was acting up to her wishes by saving them from the boors who were going to give them up to the police."

"You have acted well, my friend," said the lady of the castle, lifting her tear-filled black eyes to him; "you have acted like a man of feeling, and I thank you."

"Oh, I know that madame helps all the downtrodden and I would not regret we received two who had suffered greatly, only for the fear they would be discovered here, and that Goueznou would profit by the mishap to denounce us to the authorities."

"I little care," returned the lady after a minute's thought. "I should be at no loss to justify my conduct. But what has become of the poor people, and how did you manage with the mayor and his worthy assistants?"

"I used cunning with Master Goueznou," rejoined the steward, smiling a little. "I offered accommodation to him and his flock, including an officer of the line, who looked an honest soldier and who will be on our side at need. They accepted, and are soundly sleeping at present after a hearty meal."

"And the galley-slaves?" inquired the lady, seeming to utter the word with some repugnance.

"They showed unexpected delicacy for such people," responded Alannic. "An hour before the descent, they went away of their own accord, and I am sure they did so simply not to get us into trouble."

"That is singular," observed Madame de Kervan, becoming thoughtful, her head sinking upon her bosom as though the story had originated quite novel ideas in her mind.

The steward regarded his mistress without interruption, watching respectfully the emotions reflected upon her countenance.

The lady of Kervan castle was a woman of about fifty, whose fine regular features had preserved an incredible youthfulness. The warm, *mat* pale complexion gave her the aspect of a marble statue slightly mellowed by time. Not one wrinkle was on the skin, and her large black eyes shone with extraordinary brilliancy. The rare appearance of this noble head was perfected by an abundance of snowy tresses, and one marvelled what strange hazard had transplanted this flower of southern beauty upon the damp Breton soil.

After a long silence, the lady raised her head, and fixing her piercing gaze on the steward, inquired with an agitated voice:

"Did these men say nothing of whence they came? Do you not know their names?"

"If I had imagined that madame would care to know—" began he, surprised at any importance being attached to this.

She shook her head, discouraged.

"Stop! now I come to think of it," exclaimed the steward, fumbling

in his pockets, "I had forgotten one of them left a letter for the lady of the house."

"Give it me!" said Madame de Kervan earnestly; "give it me quickly!"

With a trembling hand she took the paper from the more and more amazed steward. As she read, her deadly pallor increased, and soon she fell back, crying out wildly:

"He! it is he!"

Alannic caught her and placed her in an arm-chair, where she remained cold and stiff for some instants. Then she sprang up convulsively, and in a sharp, stern voice blurted out these broken sentences:

"You say he went? whither? he has saved himself? Oh, Heaven will not have taken away so soon the happiness that was almost mine!"

Poor Alannic in his bewilderment was fain to believe that his mistress had suddenly gone mad.

"But these wretched spies are still here," said the Dame de Kervan, rushing to the window; "they will scour the country, hunt him, perchance arrest him. I will not let them go."

Day was breaking, and the unusual bustle in the yard betokened that the little garrison was astir. The gendarmes' jack-boots clattered on the porch, and the soldiers were merrily flocking round the pump for their ablutions. The mayor, already in his official scarf, showed his wan, grinning physiognomy at the door, whilst the lieutenant was fastening his top coat button and buckling on his sword belt. It looked like a corner in a camp at reveillé. All of a sudden the fog still surrounding the manor took a ruddy hue, and an ominous cry rose above the many sounds in the yard.

"Fire! there's fire in the barn!" shouted the gendarmes and the soldiers with one voice.

A long jet of flame, which the wind beat back upon the roof, shot out of the loft window, and a thick smoke already enveloped the outhouse.

"By thunder!" cried the foot officer, "those stupid gendarmes have set it on fire while smoking their pipes. A pretty way to repay a night's lodging!"

"We must put it out: send your men to the well—form a line," said the mayor, running about as if he was out of his wits.

"Very useful, when we have no engine and no buckets," said the lieutenant ironically. "The best thing we can do is to prevent the fire spreading, and so preserve the house."

He ordered the men to knock down a wooden gallery which connected the outhouse with the main building. All were at work with much ardour when Madame de Kervan appeared on the threshold. At the same time Alannic and the male servants came up through the garden and joined the soldiers.

The lady of the castle stood still and alone on the stone steps commanding the scene of destruction. With her uncovered head and pale visage she resembled a statue on a pedestal.

On seeing this majestic figure, the lieutenant instinctively saluted, and forgot what he was about. Although much astounded also to see

Madame de Kervan present, Master Goueznou bowed and cringed, and repeated :

"Oh, madame ! oh, madame ! such fine hay, and what a time for it to happen !"

These ridiculous lamentations did not make her turn her head. The fire itself left her heedless, so far away were her thoughts. Her eyes wandered over the flame and the busy men at her feet without her seeing them, and she muttered incoherent words :

"Saved ! this will detain them here ! and he will be saved."

Meanwhile the fire continued in its work, and cracklings of ill-omen were mingled with the roar of the brazier. The wooden building blazed like a pyre, and the joists, as their ends were burnt off, fell inside, and sent up columns of sparks. The great trees of the park, twisting in the heat, cracked with explosive sounds.

The strong north-west wind brought at intervals the tolling of the alarm bell in Kerity church tower, where the fire had been perceived. Help would, no doubt, be coming, but it was clear that it would come too late. The lieutenant pointed this out to the mayor, and how the roof was gapped by the flames.

"In ten minutes there'll be nothing left of the barn, but the house will be safe," he added, philosophically. "Really and truly, it would be rough to see a dwelling destroyed where soldiers on the march are so well greeted, to say nothing of the lady being——"

"Let me tell you," interrupted mayor Goueznou, only half-sharing the officer's sentiments, "the gendarmes were lucky to get out of the barn in time. A few minutes more and they would be 'on the grill.'"

"Quite so ; anybody lingering there would be roasted. Luckily, they all got out."

He had barely finished his consolatory phrase before a woman's scream of affright arose behind him.

"A man, a man ! there, in the fire !" cried Madame de Kervan, in a broken voice.

Her whole frame trembled. She leaned one hand on the rail not to fall, and her other hand pointed to the hay-loft window. Almost about to be swept away, it enframed a man amidst the whirls of smoke in the fiery furnace. He bent out to measure the distance to the ground. His garments were seen distinctly to curl up and catch fire from the tongues of flame blown upon him.

To render the sight still more incredible, the man carried another on his back, despite which burden he meant to attempt to descend, for they saw him reach for a chain hanging before the casement, which was the means of hoisting and lowering articles of weight. There was an indescribable moment of anguish, when all bosoms were contracted.

Madame de Kervan, petrified, could not speak or move. The lieutenant and Master Alannic ran forward, rather through instinct than in much hope of helping the wretch beyond human succour. The stupefied mayor divided his attention between the blazing window and the lady, whose attitude he studied with wicked eagerness.

The moving incident drew to an awful sequel. Twice had the man in dire peril clutched at the chain, and twice withdrawn his hands. All the beholders understood the reason, and shuddered with horror.

The chain was burning hot. The only means of safety was unapproachable. The man and his companion must perish.

"Beds! bring out the beds! he may jump down," shouted the lieutenant with all the power of his voice of command.

The steward and the servants ran indoors to execute the only order that might save the two lives. At that same instant, though, a sheet of fire rushed up and filled the window, and the man disappeared in the blast.

"Done for," muttered the lieutenant, wiping away a tear, albeit he had seen many a man die.

But a shout of joy and surprise made him look up again. The sight was as strange, but more horrible than before. By the almost red-hot chain, which slowly ran out from behind a drum, two men interclasped were descending. The heroic fugitive had dared the torture of that burning contact. In black flakes, skin peeled off his hands and knees as he kept his grip on the iron that baked his flesh, and he would not shake off the burden that hampered his descent. At last he touched ground, where twenty hands were held to receive him, and went off into a dead swoon. His companion rolled off beside him as lifeless, having had only enough strength to cling to his preserver in the descent.

The brave lieutenant was the first to superintend the help the two wretches required. He had them laid on mattresses just forthcoming and carried indoors.

From the moment the fire enveloped the window, Madame de Kervan had fled the scene and ran to lock herself up in her own room. Master Alannic, busy in the house with getting the beds out, had scarcely any time to wonder who the men were whose presence in the barn puzzled him. As for mayor Goueznou, the most affecting episodes never touched his heart, but a suspicion had germinated in his mind.

"If these be Madame de Kervan's pets the fire broke out opportunely."

Whilst the soldier sought to find a trace of life in the two men, the mayor was looking for some recognisable feature on their blackened faces. He was soon certain that the accident had served his purpose, and that the victims were his garden acquaintances of overnight.

Still they did not regain consciousness. The larger man had a large sword-cut in the thigh, which had produced probably mortal hæmorrhage. The other had a less serious stab in the leg, but he was deeply burnt on hands and knees.

"The deuce," grumbled Goueznou. "I am afraid I shall not have the pleasure of sending them to Brest prison, for it rather looks as if they would not get through the day; but I can draw up my report all the same, and the lady will have to go to Quimper to explain why she houses galley-slaves."

Master Alannic met the mournful train at the door, and recognised his guests at the first glance. He remained dumb with surprise and sorrow. He asked himself by what deplorable mischance the unhappy men had been in the burning barn after having announced their departure, and he bitterly blamed himself for having assigned that as their

hiding place. But what completely demoralised the poor steward was the memory of what transpired between him and his mistress when the fire broke out. He shuddered at the idea of telling her that the fugitives were both in custody, and yet he knew that it was important to acquaint her with the unexpected event. He was going in to do so when the lady appeared on the threshold.

The soldiers carrying the sufferers had been obliged to halt, for one of the galley-slaves, the worst wounded one, was in the pangs of death. His blood, for a time checked by the fire having cauterised the gash, flowed in clots and flooded the mattress. He faintly waved his arms and uttered incoherent words. An earthy paleness gradually covered his whole face. There was no longer lustre in his glazed eye.

For an instant Madame de Kervan contemplated the mournful picture, hesitating to come down, for a secret presentiment detained her on the doorstep. The sound of a well-known voice suddenly made her start.

"Speak to me, friend," said the galley-slave deliverer to the dying man, to whom he extended his flame-blackened hand.

With one bound the lady cleared all the steps, uttered a frightful scream and fell on her knees by the sufferers, hiding her face in her hands. The man who had been the Count de Sainte-Hélène had turned pale on seeing her, though her features were not distinguished. He bent towards her—his burnt hands tore hers from her face, and then he receded as from a spectre. His eyes closed, his limbs stiffened and his mouth contracted, but, nevertheless, these words came forth in hollow tones though they could hardly be heard :

"I am an escaped convict. Take me back to prison."

He fell in a swoon on the mattress beside his expiring comrade.

XXIX.

AN EXPLANATION.

TWELVE years before the tragic scene in the heart of Brittany, on a scorching July evening, a woman in mourning was striding along the Seine quays on the side of the Arsenal. She came from the Palais de Justice and was proceeding to the Bastille. Her hurried pace and her fixed eyes revealed deep pre-occupation. She walked swiftly, without once turning her head and without noticing the way. She looked like one fleeing from some appalling sight. Now and again, however, she stopped to lean her elbows on the parapet, and bend over to gaze long upon the river. Then she would abruptly rise and resume her irregular walk. Something stronger than her will tore her from the fascination of the water, and drove her along the deserted quays. It was clear that the strange wanderer's soul was in conflict, and that her love of life and the vertigo of suicide drew her from and attracted her to the river side.

Night fell, and the maddened woman arrived before the extremity of the Ile Louviers, then covered with stores of wood. The quays sloped down at this point to a broad strand which also smoothly sloped to the water.

Instead of continuing towards the Arsenal, the woman descended this lonely declivity, and only stopped at the river's edge. The Seine was high, and rolled its yellow waters along with a dull roar. A storm that had previously swollen its waters by bursting upon Champagne, now threatened Paris. The air was heavy and the sky loaded with black clouds.

For an instant she regarded the gloomy landscape, and listened to the hubbub of the great city, which fell on her ear like the distant thunder of the rising tide, and she was perhaps reminded of the world she was quitting. She fell on her knees and prayed. She rose, and she stepped into the rushing river.

Hurried steps clattered suddenly behind her. A man ran down the strand ready to seize her when she gave herself to the waves. This timely arrival plunged resolutely in. He swam with uncommon vigour, and soon seized the woman, whose garments had buoyed her up on the surface. In a few strokes he regained the shore, and deposited his precious burden upon it.

The hapless being had already lost her senses; her unloosed tresses floated on her shoulders, and her handsome head hung back inert and discoloured, but her heart still beat. The rescuer took up this woman whom he had so miraculously saved, and rapidly carried her to the quay, where a carriage was in waiting. Nobody was about at that hour, in a quarter scarcely inhabited, and the suicide's rescue had not been witnessed. The still insensible woman was placed in the conveyance, and it went off at full speed to the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

An hour afterwards the suicide, whom our readers will have divined as poor Rosa Marcen, opened her eyes, and saw a man at her bedside whom she recognised with profound astonishment. During two years she had often met a young Breton gentleman in society, whose good appearance she could not help remarking, and his attentions as well. Wherever she had shown herself M. de Kervan had been, and he overwhelmed the countess with respectful care. This discreet worship had the more effect on the proud Spaniard from his never breathing a word of love.

The catastrophe which led the colonel and his wife to prison did not cool the Breton's feelings, and his repressed passion was doubled by pity for her grief. With the power of intuition bestowed by love, he had almost surely divined the connection of the two, and he had made up his mind to give his hand to the woman whom the inflexible law separated from her lover.

With feverish interest he had followed the Coignard case. At the last hearing when Rosa, acquitted, left the Palais de Justice on hearing her husband condemned, and ran towards the river, Kervan understood she meant to die, and he dogged her steps to save her.

This adventure was a new departure for the Spaniard. Though despairing and ferocious at the first, Rosa was finally tamed by so much devotion. M. de Kervan pleaded that her beloved was really lost, and that no human power could, for the second time, deliver him from the galleys. But the countess, whilst she gave up all hope of Coignard's escape, vowed to soften his hardships, and made M. de Kervan promise to use all his influence and connections to obtain a

commutation of the sentence, and a full pardon later. He did not hesitate to give the pledge to do his utmost, but it was a bad time to seek the royal clemency.

The sham colonel affair had produced enormous scandal, and the opposition employed it as a weapon against the Government. To pardon the pretended Count de Sainte-Hélène would have been to furnish a new pretext for the malignity of the Liberal prints. Hence Kervan's first move fell through, and Rosa had to resign herself to wait, in spite of his loyal help. She remained in the Kervan mansion, where a year passed without her writing to the convict, as she hoped for good news to send him, and she wished to be its bearer to Toulon. But during the autumn of 1821, Monsieur de Kervan came back from the Ministry of the Interior with sad news. The convict Coignard had died in prison. The official news had come to the chief office, and was published in the press. It was an error, rectified a few days afterwards, founded upon the death of Alexandre Coignard in Rochefort prison. But Rosa and De Kervan did not know the truth.

On hearing of her lover's death, the Spaniard besought her new adorer to take her away from Paris, where her sorrow would be solitary, till she might give her life to another man. That same night they went to Brittany, where De Kervan had an important estate, and they were married in the manorial chapel three months after. Rosa had told her whole life to her husband, and he knew that her first marriage had never existed. He loved her so much as to accept her with such a past, and it was agreed no allusion should be made to it. Their union was happy.

Transformed by misfortune, Rosa had no other thought than to redeem her faults and make the generous gentleman happy who had saved her from death and misery. All her time and fortune were employed in relieving the unhappy, who were not scarce in that neglected country. The people worshipped her and would have died for her. Yet she had an enemy.

The mayor of the village was one Goueznou, who had come to buy land about there, out of a tolerable fortune he had amassed in the service of the Count de Louvigné. He was false-souled, miserly, and ambitious. Ugly stories were about regarding him, and it was whispered that he had helped his old master in one very scurvy trick. He hated Monsieur de Kervan and his wife with the envious instinct innate in low spirits, and lost no occasion to depreciate them in the country.

The Revolution of 1830 brought great changes to the peaceful life at the manor. Monsieur de Kervan was an ardent royalist, and from the first he put himself in the front of a movement preparing underhanded in the western provinces against the new Government.

From that day it was open war between the castle and the village. Hardly a month after the outbreak of July, Monsieur de Kervan died at Vannes from falling off his horse. He had gone into Morbihan to organise the insurrection, and his wife being with him had received his last sigh.

Again was Rosa Marcen free and rich, for her husband left her all his wealth. She had no other aim than to continue her husband's

political work, and almost entirely gave up home-life to put herself at the call of the royalist cause. Faithful servants replaced her at Kervan : Alannic, the devoted steward ; Antonio, the refugee Spaniard whom she had received with his wife Teresa, these watched over their dear mistress's interests, and welcomed the unfortunate as if she had been at home. Goueznou looked on with the patience of hate, guessing the lady's political action and waiting the time to strike. Such was the situation at the manor when the strangest chance brought the two galley-slaves there.

On seeing Pierre Coignard, whom she had believed dead these ten years, Rosa had felt one of those blows which kill or craze. His feeling was one of violent hate and deep contempt. He could not forgive her having forgotten him, and he detested life on seeing that she was rich, noble, and happy. So much ingratitude disgusted him, and wrath tore from him the cry :

"Take me back to prison !"

The avowal was public. The colonel had doomed himself to die in the galley-slave's irons. The good-hearted Alannic, though only partially comprehending the lamentable incident, shielded his mistress from the hideous sight that ensued by carrying her to her room. When she opened her eyes, the mayor had finished his work.

Coignard was taken away on the mattress by the gendarmes, their only prisoner. L'excellent, who had had the courage not to scream out when the sabre laid his thigh open, had died without recovering consciousness.

When the sad train was gone, deathly silence reigned in the yard. The fire had burned itself out and the peasants had followed the soldiers. Madame de Kervan called the faithful servant who watched at her bedside, and, in a dying voice, said :

"Go, fetch me the priest."

XXX.

EPILOGUE.

IN 1834 the hospital of Brest prison was a long, one-storey building, separated by a broad yard from the convicts' dormitories, and by a narrow walk from the Rue de la Mairie. The underground floor, exclusively reserved for the patients, was occupied by the baths, kitchen, and medical store-rooms.

On the upper floor was a square hall, a guard-room for the warders, where the nurses, barbers, and "penman" were in the day time. There also the huge stove for warming the potions was the centre of the group of the aristocrats of the prisoners, those who temporarily were on the sick list, which is always a desideratum in such places. Keepers and prisoners sit around this place in perfect good fellowship, and often the conversation is kept up by some felon conversationalist. After this ante-chamber, which was neutral ground, there was a fever ward, 117 beds in two rows, and the accident ward, containing at that time 53 beds.

At a first glance these two halls do not differ from those in naval and

military hospitals. The same beds, sheets, furniture, food, attentions, and medicine, everything is the same.

But the large windows on both sides are heavily barred with iron, and every night a convict blacksmith, under a warder's superintendence, comes and "rings" all the gratings with a sledge hammer to make sure of their integrity. The lugubrious clang reminds the patients they are still in prison, and, besides, a still more mournful operation brings back those oblivious of the stern reality. At nightfall a nurse brings round a hammer and portable anvil, and fastens every patient's coupling chain to a ring in the foot of the bed. These chains are long enough to let the wearer rise, and the nurse comes round to free him every morning before the doctor's visit.

Before the healing science the inflexible regulation relaxes; when the physician faces him the number becomes a man. Needless to say that the dangerously ill patients are exempt from this chaining down, and they may even be released from the coupling-chain altogether if the doctor demands it. To die out of irons is the ambition, the desire of the wretches, a supreme joy rarely refused them.

On one of the closing December days of the year 1834, around bed No. 110 in the fever ward, a doctor, several students, and a sister of charity were looking on a prisoner dying. A wooden tablet at the head of the bed bore this inscription:

"Pierre Coignard, *alias* Pontis de Sainte-Hélène."

The patient had preserved full consciousness, and the approach of death had not altered his features. He had been only a few days in the hospital. He seemed to be in no pain. The doctor had found no ailment but a long-standing asthma. But life was gradually running out of the exhausted frame, and he would fade away like a lamp deprived of oil.

Coignard felt death's stroke when he recognised Rosa Marcen in the courtyard of Kervan manor, and he told them at the prison that they would not keep him long. Yet his robust constitution had made him last four years, though the physicians had given him up from the first. These latter-day sufferings had been softened by the sympathy and attentions of the keepers and his companions. His fame had preceded him, and though the story of his last adventures was but imperfectly known, his former career in the upper classes amply sufficed to make him the most remarkable inmate. He never faltered for a day in playing the convict colonel.

His excellent manners, his exceeding personal attentions, and his unexceptional bearing made those stare who knew not his life. But the reserve of his speech struck observers most. He spoke simply, naturally, without emphasis and with no pretension. He never "showed off," as the cant goes. He avoided talking about his early years, and abstained from protesting he was the victim of a judicial error, but all his conduct and what he did say bore this out. The feeling he inspired in his chain-companions was respect. They never spoke of him but as the Count de Sainte-Hélène, and not one ever considered him an equal. It is hard to say to-day whether they really believed in his sincerity. An intelligent eye-witness of his death thinks opinions were divided.

For the mass of the felons he was a count and a colonel. For the

cream of the gangs he was Pierre Coignard, the most skilful and luckiest of swindlers. To all he appeared a superior character.

When the news of his approaching death spread over the prison, it was quite an event, and the old convicts lying in the hospital forgot their woes to ask after him.

On this last day of his tumultuous existence, when the doctor went away after the shake of the head—which is almost always a death-warrant—the grey nun remained alone by the bed.

She was an austere woman, whose thin features bore traces of long suffering. Only her eyes lived in a pale face, with the immobility of wax. But a few months arrived from the naval hospital, this was her first day's duty in the convict wards. She had specially requested a service rarely besought.

Plunged in the weakness resembling sleep which precedes the last hour, the patient feebly shivered, and uttered some scarcely articulate plaint. The sister took his hand and softly pressed it in hers. The contact made him open his eyes, and they met those of the nun, which wore an unspeakably doleful expression.

"It is I, Pierre!" said the sister of Saint Vincent de Paul, sweetly. "I wished to see you, that I might obtain my pardon."

The dying man did not reply. The violent contest agitating his soul was shown by the contraction of his features and the great tears rolling down his cheeks.

"God has forgiven me, Pierre," she continued, tremulously; "are you going to be less merciful!"

"You have done me much evil, but I forgive you," breathed the felon, whose eyes closed, and he resumed his former ominous rigidity.

The nun fell on her knees beside his bed, and murmured words which the beholders took for a prayer.

"I loved you, Pierre," she said, so faintly that none but Coignard heard her, "and I shall belong evermore to heaven alone."

The convict cast a last look of pardon and tenderness upon his beloved, and the final sigh of the dying man's breath was exhaled from his lips.

The vast hall was silent and gloomy, as the grey sister prayed alone over the remains of the "Convict Colonel."

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